

What We Leave Behind: A Novel

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Jane Austen's enduring popularity is no accident. Her books are filled to the brim with relatable, lovable characters, realistic situations and interactions, and insightful commentary and criticism of Regency England. Many of those criticisms and observations are still applicable today, and it is this universality and timelessness of Jane Austen's work that this project is meant to bring out. By adapting Austen's final novel, *Persuasion*, to take place in the American Midwest just after the Vietnam War, *What We Leave Behind: A Novel* shows the reader how the world of Jane Austen's characters is not so far removed from the modern era as he or she may like to think and how history does, in fact, tend to repeat itself. It also explores themes of alienation, racism, the treatment of Vietnam veterans, and the struggles of deindustrialization, all of which relate to the themes which Austen touched on but are also, within *What We Leave Behind*, somewhat unique to the time and place in which this adaptation is set.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Elizabeth Dalton with all my heart for all she has done for me throughout my undergraduate career. She has been the single greatest influence on my scholarship and writing since I arrived at Ball State University, and her continued guidance and critiques throughout the process of putting this thesis together have been invaluable to me. I would like to thank her for all she has given me over the last four years and for showing me just how layered, complex, and intriguing the novels of Jane Austen are. I would not have been able to come up with or execute a project like this without her.

I would also like to thank my writing partner, McKenna Telsrow. She always caught me when my sentences went on for far too long or my ideas and syntax made no sense to anyone but myself, and my text is much better for it. I would like to thank her for all her hard work and for the privilege of getting to work on her project.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my parents, Todd and Dana Garrett, for their unending support and help. They encouraged me to read and write as much as possible for as long as I remember, and I will never be able to thank them enough for that. Along with Professor Dalton, they both provided a lot of helpful information about what it was like to live during the 1970s. My father's love of history and inspiration of that same love in myself was one of the biggest driving forces behind this project, and I never would have seen the historical parallels that gave me the idea in the first place without that. My mother's love for Jane Austen and constant recommendation of her novels to me over the years was one of the main reasons that I took Professor Dalton's class on Austen's novels in the first place, and, thanks to my mother, I found one of my new favorite authors. I would like to thank them both for always supporting me and helping me to become the scholar and author I am today; I love them very much, even if I don't always make that abundantly clear.

Lastly, I would like to thank Crystal Yarberry for her constant support and motivation, as well. She was always there with me, cheering me on when I needed encouragement and calling me out when my bad habits got in my way, and her love and support got me through a lot of long, work-filled nights. Whenever I was worried that I couldn't pull this off or that I was in over my head, she was always there to help me back to solid ground, and I'll always be thankful for that. I love her very much, and this project would have been much more difficult without her.

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Process Analysis for *What We Leave Behind*

It took me a long time to find my way to Jane Austen. Even though I have been a voracious reader for as long as I remember and have always loved classic authors, despite the constant urgings of my Austen-loving mother, I still had not read any of her works by the time that I arrived in college. When I read her first novel (in terms of when it was written), *Northanger Abbey*, during my freshman year at Ball State, I quickly realized both what I had been missing out on and why my mother and so many millions of others had been lauding Austen for so many years. Her books were not just sickly-sweet romances that were fodder for a Sunday afternoon with nothing else to do; they were not just more formal and buttoned-up versions of what you can buy for \$1.50 at any airport or Wal-Mart bookshelf. These were beautiful, intelligent works that, while they often had romance at the core of their stories, were more concerned with the humanity of their characters and the myriad struggles that women faced during the Regency era of England. *Pride and Prejudice* is famous for the romance between Lizzie Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, but it is also an intimate portrait of the cutthroat struggle at the time that families who had many daughters faced in trying to nail down a financially secure future for their children, who would otherwise have extremely limited means of supporting themselves. *Northanger Abbey* has a great deal of romance and often lampoons the tropes of Gothic horror, but it is also a very smart satire of that genre and contains a number of biting criticisms of attitudes of English male superiority. *Sense and Sensibility* also functions as a masterful critique of the problems with Neoclassicism and Romanticism and the virtues of not leaning too far in either direction. The novel that stuck with me the longest and made the strongest impression upon me, however, was her final one: *Persuasion*.

When I took a colloquium with Professor Elizabeth Dalton centered entirely around the life and works of Jane Austen, I expected to have a lot of fun in the class and to learn a great deal about an author and time period about which I had very limited knowledge. My expectations were met and

exceeded; however, what I did not expect was that, rather than falling head-over-heels for the novels that most people cite as their favorites from Austen (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and, less commonly, *Emma*, though a ranked list for me would have *Pride and Prejudice* in second place), I could not get *Persuasion* out of my head. Written by a much more mature and reflective Austen, this novel takes place in 1816, a year after the end of the Napoleonic wars and four years before the end of the Regency era, in which King George III's son ruled in his stead before formally ascending the throne as George IV. The book follows the demure Anne Elliott, the second daughter of a land-poor aristocrat, as she navigates her family's financial troubles while also reckoning with the return of her ex-fiancé, Frederick Wentworth, who is now flush with wealth from his exploits as a naval captain in the wars. This book, however, like all the others, is much more than a simple romance.

Persuasion is an extremely deft look at the social and economic shifts that were occurring during the Regency era. People like Anne's father, Walter, who were from established noble families, were struggling to get by, but still looked down their noses at people like Frederick, self-made individuals who had a great deal of wealth but who still did not come from a noble birth. British society was sick of the decade of wars that they had just endured and, while lauding the return of the soldiers, was anxious for the return to peacetime life. Austen, furthermore, examines the ramifications of youthful decisions and the ways that they can affect us later in life. This sets the stage for the romance between Anne and Frederick, who, as the novel progresses, must overcome their pride and their fear of rejection to realize that they still love each other. The extremely romantic and emotional climax comes when Frederick delivers Anne a letter; this letter tells her that he was wrong to have distanced himself from her when he first returned and that, despite his best efforts, he will never be able to deny that he loves her with all his heart. It was this mature romance that does not just tug on the heartstrings but full-on yanks them in combination with insightful social commentary and sharp wit that made me fall in love with this book more than the others, and

it was for these reasons that I thought the book would be perfect to adapt to the setting in which my own novel takes place.

I knew that I wanted to do something with *Persuasion* for my thesis almost as soon as I finished the novel, but I did not know exactly what to do with it; however, as I ruminated on the idea, I thought about different ways that I may be able to adapt the novel (as I have been a creative writer for years and always wanted to do a creative thesis). Then, when I was in England for the field study portion of the colloquium, everything fell into place: I would adapt it to take place in the American Midwest in 1976, a year after the end of the Vietnam War and during the presidency of Gerald Ford. The parallels were perfect: the books would take place 160 years apart, but both would take place after a long and protracted war (or wars) that fundamentally shifted the ways that both Britain and America thought about warfare, themselves, and the social and economic structures within their respective countries. They would both take place during a regency of sorts (*Persuasion* in the literal sense, my own novel in a figurative sense, since Ford only held the position thanks to Nixon's resignation), and the leader at the time of each of these books was widely held to be rather ineffectual and forgettable. *Persuasion* took place during the transition between the old aristocracy and a more industry-oriented economy in which people could make their own fortunes rather than inheriting them; my own piece would take place during the energy crisis of the 1970s and, if it took place in the Midwest, would also involve the beginning of deindustrialization, which crippled the local economies of innumerable towns and cities in what came to be known as the Rust Belt. Furthermore, while much has changed in the 200 years since the publication of *Persuasion*, family dynamics have largely stayed the same. Anne's father explicitly favors her older sister and largely ignores her; Anne relies a great deal upon her grandmother (who was a family friend in Austen's original novel) for support and advice, whether that advice was sound or not; and Anne's youngest sister was stuck as the wife in a family that, while it provided for her, did not seem to make her very

happy or fulfilled. I thought that translating these dynamics into my own story would be a great way to show people that this era, while it may seem entirely removed from the world that we live in now, is not really that distant or separate.

I did, however, have some major differences that I wanted to introduce into the story, both to differentiate my own work from Austen's and so that I could account for the issues or differences in issues unique to the '70s in my novel. For example, rather than having the Johnson family (my version of the Elliott family, who all have the same first names) be rich, landed aristocrats (or a 20th-century American equivalent), I converted them into a blue-collar family who, even though they did not have a great deal of disposable income, still lived comfortably in a large house that had been built by an ancestor and who had good, stable jobs (Anne as a restaurant hostess, Walter as a factory worker) until the arrival of deindustrialization and the energy crisis. Things were already getting tight, but with the arrival of deindustrialization, Walter would lose his job and, because of the loss of one of his legs in World War II, would have a very hard time finding a steady job with comparable income. This allowed me to touch upon the same themes as Austen did but to also interact with the unique economic situation that the Midwest was facing at the time and to explore the way that America treated both veterans and the disabled.

This was continued by my version of Captain Wentworth, Freddy Henderson, who is an African-American pilot who did two tours in Vietnam. During Austen's time, there was not a lot of research into the effects of war on the psychological health of soldiers; however, in the modern era, we are now aware of the severe effects that conditions such as PTSD can have on those returning from combat. Therefore, while I kept the situation of Freddy relatively the same as his counterpart in the Austen novel, I also decided to have him suffer from PTSD, so that I could explore the ways that different individuals at this time may have treated someone suffering from such a condition and how he himself might have dealt with it. Americans were also far more hostile to Vietnam veterans

than the British were to those who came back from the Napoleonic wars, so this allowed me a lot of room to explore the ways that being simultaneously seen as a hero by some and an outcast by others (whether that be because of his mental illness, his role as a soldier, or his skin color) may affect someone. This is the contrast that I set up with characters such as Benny Crane (Freddy's war buddy) and Walter, who laud Freddy for his service and accept him as a companion, as opposed to Anne's older sister and Chuck Haynes, a family friend, who revile Freddy for his service in Vietnam (the latter also hating him because he perceives Freddy as a threat to his romantic interests). They call him "child-killer" and constantly berate him for crimes that he did not commit but which they see him as complicit in as a member of the U.S. military. The complicated relationship between average soldiers and a military/country that committed atrocities in warfare, even if they were not involved at all, was also a relationship that I wanted to explore.

When I actually sat down to write this novel, I did not map out a specific plot outline or the event-by-event sequence of the story. That's not how I have ever worked on fiction. Rather, I had come up with a series of major events in the story that served as counterparts to major scenes in *Persuasion* and knew what I wanted to do with these scenes, rather than knowing exactly where they would come in the course of the book or what could precede or follow them. After I discussed this with Professor Dalton, we agreed on a set of specific scenes that we thought were critical to the plot of the novel and directly and accurately showcased the themes that I was tackling in this book and the character traits that I most wanted to highlight. These are the scenes which are included in the following thesis. I did, however, make sure to fully outline the roles of the characters within the stories and their personalities and relationships with each other, as well as the conflicts that they would have with each other as the book went on. While I fully intend to complete the novel after the school year ends and I have more time to work on it, we both agreed that trying to write a full-fledged and well-edited book during the course of one school year was not quite feasible (especially

since I would be taking 23 credit hours of classes in my final semester), so we settled on these scenes as the material that would best serve the thesis project.

I turned in two or three chapters for each draft due date, rather than revising the same chapters over and over and turning them in each time. My plan was to edit them in-depth as I went along and turn them all in at once for the final due date. To write each of these blocks, I decided which scenes that I wanted to tackle first (my decisions being guided by what I thought that I was equipped to write at that point in the process and what would also provide enough context for my writing partner, McKenna Telsrow, to be able to know what was going on, since she had also read *Persuasion* in the same class as I but was not fully aware of how I would execute my own story) and, after that, wrote them usually in one fell swoop. I would not write non-stop until they were completed (I had classes, homework, and myriad distractions to prevent that), but they would usually be written within the course of about 24 hours at the most, with much of the sections being written in stretches of 10-15 pages (the finished sections I would turn in for review would be about 25-30). This was partly due to procrastination (a habit that I have failed to break, though the thesis course with Professor Dalton helped a great deal to diminish its effects), but this was also because, once I get rolling on a piece of writing, I find myself falling into a sort of “zone” where the ideas are flowing freely and I can see everything playing out clearly in my head, as though I were watching a movie. While I will have to take breaks to rest my hands and wrists, get something to eat, etc., usually I try to stop the flow at these points as little as possible. I often listen to music while I write, too, and I will usually pick songs that match the emotional tone of the scenes that I am writing (both with and without words) to help get my mind into this space and to facilitate my writing, since I always seem to write more consistently and faster if there is music playing to keep out the world’s distractions.

I have had a bad habit in the past of waiting for this kind of mood to descend upon me when writing for my own pleasure, but one of the biggest things that I have learned from this whole process is that I do not have to wait for this and, really, cannot do that. I have deadlines to meet and writing to produce and, come hell or high water, I needed to turn something in, even if it was not great. What I found when I forced myself to sit down and just start writing, however, was that, soon after I got to the task, that mood would appear, and I would be seeing these characters and their actions as clearly in my head as if they were playing upon my television. It was not a matter of waiting for inspiration to strike; it was a matter of pulling the lever to my imagination over and over until the cogs finally started turning, whether they wanted to or not. I am sure that was helped by my passion for this project.

I am not trying to say that writer's block is not real (it is *extremely* real and very unpleasant), but I realized that writing is a lot easier to kick into high gear when I have the determination to do so. I also forced myself not to self-edit too much when writing the first draft. I have always had a bad habit of correcting people, and I do this to myself without end when writing. I can agonize for fifteen minutes about something so simple as whether a certain type of carpeting would be in a house with a certain type of people of a certain economic background in a certain location in a certain time period, and, let me tell you, that's not a fun rabbit hole to fall down. At the advice of Professor Dalton, I had to tell that editor voice to hush up during the writing of the first draft and to wait until my revisions to come out and, lo and behold, I was able to work much better and faster when writing my first drafts, and I honestly did not miss that editor voice one bit. He may have come out a couple times to nitpick certain details, like what time Walter Cronkite would have come on the evening news, but, by and large, he sat in the corner until I told him he could come and help.

The second drafts of these sections are where he really had his time to shine. There were numerous errors that he was happy to catch (such as overuse of adverbs), and I have always loved

revising both my own work and others', so this part was much more enjoyable than some might think; however, I had an enormous amount of help from both McKenna and Professor Dalton for this part of the process. Both of them pointed out numerous issues with my chapters, such as my often convoluted and sometimes nonsensical sentence structure; descriptions that did not work; style choices in rendering thoughts, dialogue, and sounds (I tended to use italics for everything, which admittedly got a little confusing); and inconsistencies in the actions of characters. They were also very helpful in showing me where certain elements did not really fit with the time period (such as when characters would say things that were not common during the 1970's or common items were missing from the rooms they were in) or were not important for the story and could be cut (since I have a problem of getting caught up in describing scenes and bringing the plot to a screeching halt sometimes). These were the major issues that I tackled when first revising all of my chapters.

Going forward, I mostly checked them for remaining grammatical issues and made sure that they all aligned with each other in tone, character actions, and overall consistency. Since I was not making the full book for the thesis project, I needed to make sure that, while aligning with the vision I had for the entire story, the chapters also worked together well enough to serve as a self-contained slice of the narrative and to show the reader of my thesis the major points and interactions. I also had to make sure that this was not too obvious and up-front; the original draft of the chapter that comes near the end of the overall story had a very long speech by Freddy dealing with all the issues that he faces throughout the book, and both Professor Dalton and I agreed that it sounded too much like the author preaching at the reader. That speech served more as a template for me to use when thinking about Freddy's character and the ways that people treat him throughout the rest of the book, rather than as a critical character moment, and I ended up leaving a great deal of it on the

cutting room floor in the end so that the reader can figure it out for themselves, rather than having me condescend to them at the novel's emotional climax.

Throughout the revision process, I also kept the research that I had done for the project in mind. My project dealt with numerous complicated topics from different time periods, as well as the act of writing itself, so I had a wide assortment of sources. For my research on Vietnam and the 1970s, I used the Ken Burns documentary about the war as a major source about the war itself and, through Bracken Library, checked out books about the gas crisis in the early '70s and the process of deindustrialization in the Midwest. This research in particular showed me just how much that I did not know about both my own region and the Vietnam War as a whole. While I knew broad strokes about the war and American involvement in it, there is a rich and dark history of American influence in Vietnam that I had no idea existed (such as the fact that the Americans had promised independence to the Vietnamese in return for their help fighting Japan in the '40s, only for us to renege on that promise when the Cold War came about and we could not stand to lose France as an ally, a dynamic which influenced the way that I portrayed America's turning its back upon Vietnam veterans). I also became enlightened about the numerous effects of deindustrialization on the Midwest and just how unprepared and scrambling the leaders of the region were to stop the rusty tide that came their way. I also interviewed members of my family who were alive during the '70s and who had parents who worked in factories, as their knowledge about the time period and experiences as members of families similar to that which I focused on (although neither of them had parents that lost their jobs) was critical as a reference point. Professor Dalton also provided a lot of helpful tips in this area.

I used *Persuasion* as a major reference point in this project, of course, but I added to that a biography of Jane Austen and a political history of the Regency era to provide more context to my knowledge of Austen's novel and the time period and to possibly provide me with more parallels

that I could use in my own story. When researching the act of writing itself, I decided to go through two well-known texts about creative writing: *The Art of Fiction* by John Gardner (the renowned professor and author of *Grendel*) and *On Writing* by Stephen King (the famous horror, suspense, sci-fi, fantasy, and mystery writer). I had read *On Writing* before, and much of what King said about fiction had influenced my early writing, but it was helpful for me to reread his ideas and to see how I had still hewn to his tips or, in a surprising number of cases, branched away from his line of thinking. On top of that, it was very helpful to read John Gardner as a counterpoint, since he has been often cited as an extremely refined and “literary” author (in opposition to King, who critics have sneered at for years, but whom I see as worthy of serious academic study regardless), and because of his much more scholarly deconstruction of the craft (as King’s book, while very informative, reads like a fireside chat as the two of you sip coffee and he smokes a cigarette opposite). I think of myself as having a fair amount of experience in fiction writing and editing for someone my age, but these books showed me that, even though I may be doing well in my knowledge of these fields, there is always a great deal more for me to learn.

I was worried about how these scenes would come together and if they would fit well and seem realistic, as I have only attempted a writing project as long as this thesis once before (in high school, an effort that is dripping with inexperience and inconsistencies when I revisit it now), but, as the project went on, I was surprised to see how well this story worked. Professor Dalton and McKenna confirmed this in their reviews, and, while I have a long way to go in completing the full novel, I was extremely happy to see that my idea was not falling apart at the seams as soon as I had begun. My passion for Jane Austen, history, writing, and this story has not decreased throughout the duration of the creation of this thesis (in fact, it has probably increased). This project is the culmination of everything that I have learned up to this point in my life, both in my major areas of study (history, English, and creative writing) and in my knowledge about human beings and their

interactions. At the end of the day, whether this book falls flat on its face or turns into the project that I hope it to be, I have gotten an enormous amount of joy from putting it together. I hope that you, dear reader, come away from this story (or, at least, its major scenes) with something more than you had when you first come upon it. I know that I have.

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What We Leave Behind: A Novel

Bad News

Three sharp knocks on the door ripped Anne from her deep, dreamless sleep.

When she opened her eyes, her eyelids instantly flew shut again once they were met with the stabbing glare of the sun through her window. She groped around for the clock on her nightstand to see what time it was, bumping a glass of water and nearly toppling it in the process.

Three more knocks, rattling the door on its hinges.

“What?!” she called out, her voice still thick and groggy with slumber.

“Are you going to make breakfast any time soon, or are you just gonna leave me out here to starve?”

The shrill, nagging voice of Walter Johnson carrying through the door led her to yank a pillow over her head and groan.

“Well?”

Why won't he just shut up and let me get some sleep for once?!

“I’ll be out in a minute!” she called back, gritting her teeth and digging her fingers into the pillow as though she were trying to crush the handfuls of feathers and fabric into dust. She waited, wondering if he would say anything more, but then the squeak of his wheelchair rolling down the hall meant that she could relax, if only for a few moments.

Anne sat up in bed, putting her head in her hands to further shield her aching eyes from the unrelenting sun. She tried to take a deep breath, but her still tired lungs weren’t ready for the sudden intake of air, and her intended sigh came out a spasm of half-hearted coughs. She stole a glance back at her nightstand and finally got a look at the clock face: 7:45 in the morning. A groan flew from her lips as her head returned to its palm-bound perch. *Can't he ever wake up past nine? Just for once? Like, one*

time in his entire life? After a few more moments in this position, Anne threw the pea-soup green covers back and stood up, her knees crackling like thick knots in burning logs.

Good morning, starshine; the earth says go fuck yourself.

She chuckled at this thought as she shuffled toward the door and out of her bedroom, emerging into a hallway that smelled of plaster dust and stale cigarettes. The open door of her father's bedroom stood open to greet her, giving her a peek into the disheveled, chaotic universe that Walter retreated into every night. At least three empty candy wrappers glinted at her on top of the covers.

Do you even need breakfast with snacking habits like that?

She shook her head as she turned and walked into the living room, where Walter was sitting in the nappy, broken-down, puce monstrosity that was his favorite recliner. His eyes were glued to an ad for Lysol in anticipation of the morning news popping up after some anonymous woman's piano was declared more clean and shiny than she had ever hoped it could be. His right leg sat alone on the footstool in front of him, looking forlorn without a partner.

"Two fried eggs, five strips of bacon, two slices of toast," he said, his voice flat, his head not even twitching in her direction. "Make sure to use plenty of butter."

Anne glared daggers at him through the back of the chair, but there was no way that any emotion of hers would pierce through the impenetrable skull that lay below his balding scalp.

"I know, Dad."

She stalked into the kitchen, which was just as painfully bright as her bedroom, and made her way to the stove to start collecting the tools for her father's fatty feast.

"You're not even gonna say hi to your own sister?"

Anne froze in place, closed her eyes, and forced a frustrated cloud of air through her nose.

Oooooooof course.

She turned in place to find Liz lounging at the kitchen table, a cigarette in hand and a tangle of sleep-mussed hair poofing out from her head. She was framed by the light streaming in from the open window above the sink, which set her orange robe aflame and almost made her pale skin too bright to look at. The smoke from her cigarette floated lazily above her hand, occasionally twisting when a faint spring breeze wafted in from outside.

Anne plastered a customer service smile on her face and said “Good morning, oh so sweet and adorable sister,” through gritted teeth before turning back to pull a skillet out of the oven.

Liz put a mask of mock surprise on her face, letting out a melodramatic gasp.

“I say,” she said in the worst British accent imaginable, “I would not have expected more proper manners from the Queen herself! How *ever* did you grow up to be such a respectable and approachable young lady?!”

Anne fought the urge to chuck the skillet at Liz’s head and walked to the fridge to grab the eggs and bacon.

“It’s called getting out of the house. You should try it sometime; then maybe you’d look less like a vampire.”

Liz pulled her robe up over her face and tried a hand at an eastern European accent with results just as disastrous as the attempt at the Queen’s English: “Vaht, eggzentric oond bootiful?”

A wry smile from Anne. “No, deathly pale and smelling like a crypt.”

Liz dropped her robe in a pout. She tried to kick at Anne’s leg as she passed, but Anne dodged it with a practiced shuffle to the left and placed the ingredients on the counter.

“Classic Anne, always trying to tear me down just because I know I’m beautiful and don’t have to worry about putting on a pound of makeup in the morning to cover up those acne scars.”

Anne spun around and mimed stabbing a knife into her chest, falling against the counter.

“Oh God, Liz, you have wounded me to my *core*! How *ever* shall I recover from such a *devastating* insult as this?! I dare not even emerge from this house again!”

Liz smiled perkily. “Finally! It seemed like you would never take the hint when I was telling you to use those new soaps that I found at the new store in the mall.”

Now it was Anne’s turn to act aghast as she threw a series of bacon strips onto the pan. They sizzled rancorously in the morning air, now still. “What?! My sister, Elizabeth Charity Johnson, actually *left the house*?! Somebody call Walter Cronkite, this is headline news! That hasn’t happened at least since Eisenhower was in office!”

“Oh please, I leave the house all the time.”

“Yeah, to do nothing but spend Dad’s money or while the night away in the backseat of someone’s car. Who was it last night? Danny? Brandon? Emma? I heard you stumbling in around two in the morning. You’re horrible at keeping quiet; Dad would’ve known what you’re up to long ago if he didn’t keep the TV blaring all night.”

Liz’s face was no longer pale; it was burning as red as a Valentine’s rose.

“My personal life is no business of yours, Anne, and you have no right to throw it back in my face like that.”

Anne’s face burned and her heart sank; Liz was right. No matter how much she sponged off of their father’s income, who she spent the night with had nothing to do with it. Now anything she could say would be poisoned by that attack. Silence hung between them like a slab of beef in a walk-in freezer: cold, thick, and raw. Anne turned back to the frying pan, staring at the strips of bacon crackling on the hot iron, wishing she could disappear into the fire that was searing them by the second. She pulled out a spatula and began to flip them as the front door opened in the living room and a gust of cool air swept through the house.

“Good *man*-ning!”

The corners of Anne's mouth twitched upward in spite of herself. That chipper southern reveille could only mean one thing: Grandma Russell had arrived. She could hear the old dame's costume jewelry and endless miles of bracelets jingling already. As the door slammed shut, a thick cloud of cloying perfume that smelled like lavender mixed with bleach swept the kitchen, sending Anne and Liz into a simultaneous fit of coughing as they struggled not to suffocate. They looked at each other through watering eyes and smiled, reaching a half-reconciliation in what felt like it might be their final moments on Earth before passing into a perfume-induced coma.

They could hear Walter reply with his traditional "Morning, Ma. How's it looking out there?" His leg always ached to no end when rain came, and he had believed that Grandma Russell had a preternatural ability to sense the oncoming weather patterns ever since she predicted a tornado on the day of Liz's eighteenth birthday. The tornado had touched down thirty miles away and never even crossed the Bismarck city limits, but this didn't seem to faze his confidence.

"Oh, it'll cloud up later on, but I reckon it'll stay just as cold and sunny as it is right now into tomorrow."

"Ma, it's not cold, the weather guy just said it's in the low sixties out there!"

"Exactly! I rest my case. I got your mail for you; doesn't look like anything more than a check and some useless ads. Now, where are my lovely little granddaughters?"

"We're in here, Grandma!" Anne called out, trying to stifle an aftershock from the initial quake that had rocked her lungs.

Grandma Russell, her hair a silver river down her back, her sun-hardened skin flecked with liver spots, and her ice blue eyes sparkling, poked her head around the frame of the kitchen entryway, turning her necklaces and bracelets into a clattering chorus across her chest and arms.

“Well, lookie there! I swear, y’all look more beautiful every time I lay eyes on you! And Anne making breakfast? I stopped by at the *perfect* time. What’s the occasion? Your daddy drag you outta bed kickin’ and screamin’ again?”

Anne’s smile widened, all the answer she needed.

“Mm-hmm, I thought as much. Walter, when are you ever gonna learn to work a stove for yourself?”

Walter only grunted in reply, rolling slowly into the kitchen behind his mother-in-law as he unwrapped one of the envelopes from a slim pile of mail on his lap.

“Well, I won’t be needing anything, I already had a hearty breakfast of my own, but I can surely help if you’re needing any assistance. Unless Elizabeth suddenly takes it into her head to lend a helping hand for once, of course! Oh, close your mouth, Lizzie, you’ll catch flies like that. I was only teasing.”

As she said this last, she glanced at Anne and winked. Anne, who always appreciated having someone in the house who didn’t see Liz as an angel come to Earth, stifled a giggle and said, “I’ve got the bacon, but I would appreciate some help with the eggs after that’s all done. You know I’m not so good at making sure the yolks aren’t overcooked.”

Grandma Russell smiled, her eyes slightly misty. “The very same issue your dear mother used to have. Whenever I tried to teach her to fry eggs she somehow managed to turn them into charcoal the first few times, I still don’t know *how* she managed that one. You just sit tight, love, and I’ll get those right up for you.”

Anne pulled a plate down from the cabinet above her and began scooping out the bacon from the skillet as Grandma Russell moved in to take over. As she moved down the counter, looking for the bread, she asked, “Dad, how many slices did you want again?”

Only the cracking of an eggshell and the thick bubbling of egg yolk and bacon grease on hot iron answered her.

“Dad?”

She turned around to see her father clutching the letter he had just opened, his jaw clenched, his hands shaking hard enough that the paper had begun to rattle.

“Dad, what’s wrong?”

The kitchen had fallen still, the attention of the three women all on Walter’s stony countenance.

“Walter?” Grandma Russell asked, her voice worried. “Y’all right, hon?”

He was silent for a few minutes more before slamming the letter down on the table and screaming “*GODDAMMIT!*” at the top of his lungs. The table almost flipped, and Liz and Grandma Russell scrambled to grab it and keep it from falling into his lap along with the letter, which lazily drifted back down onto what remained of his left leg. As they righted the table once more, everyone was deathly silent, not daring to say a word, until Walter finally found his voice:

“It’s the plant. It’s the goddamn plant. They’re... they’re letting me go.”

Adjustments

No one said anything for what felt like an hour or more. Grease occasionally popped in the stove and one or two cars rumbled past outside, but, otherwise, there was nothing to break the pregnant, sickened silence that had seized the Johnson family. Walter sat almost completely still, staring at the paper in his lap like it was the rotting carcass of a possum, stinking of decay and wriggling with maggots. Liz and Grandma Russell both still held their hands around the edges of the table, holding it in place as though the entire stability of the family depended upon that table not moving an inch from where it currently sat. Anne, meanwhile, stood at the opposite end of the room, staring at her father. Even though he wasn't moving, he seemed to be getting farther and farther away, the entire room expanding around her even as she knew that was physically impossible. Her hands began to tremble, and darkness began to encroach at the edges of her vision. It was getting harder and harder to breathe, almost as though her lungs were rejecting the air that she kept pumping in. Her hands jerked out and grabbed the counter, and she did her best to steady herself and keep from fainting. Now was not the time to panic.

After it began to seem like no one in the family would ever speak again, Grandma Russell's larynx finally finished its hard reset: "They... they can't do that... You've been working there for years, ever since you got back from the war..."

Walter snorted in disgust so violently that his chair rattled.

"You'd think that would mean something to these people, or at *least* to Jack, but apparently all that matters in the country anymore is how much money you can shove into your wallets and fuck everything else."

Liz was second to pluck her voice back from the void: "B-but, don't you have some sort of protection or something? From the union?"

“No, this isn’t like that. They’re not just dumping me, they’re dropping more than half of us all. Some bullshit about budget issues, but everyone knows that that’s just code for keeping money away from the people doing the actual damn work and just holding it tight in their fat, sweaty fists.”

Walter subconsciously wiped his palms on his pajamas, as though he thought the grime of a money-grubbing boss might somehow have contaminated him just by holding the letter.

“Walter, I’m sure they don’t have much of a choice. You know how tough things have been the past few years, what with the gas crisis and all...”

“I DON’T CARE ABOUT THE GODDAMN GAS CRISIS!”

Walter’s fists plunged onto the table again, but this time Liz and Grandma Russell’s preemptive caution kept it in place.

“I’ve never cared about the gas crisis! I’ve never *had* to! No matter what, for *thirty goddamn years*, I haven’t had to worry about *anything* like that, and you know why? It’s because that backstabbing prick Jack Goldstone promised me that when I got back from Germany, I would have a place in his factory for life. For *LIFE!* Then he sells out to that godforsaken car company and suddenly its ‘oh, sorry Walt, we can’t schedule you on ‘Tuesdays’ this, or ‘oh, *sorry* Walt, we’ve had to cut back on expenses’ that. And you know what? You know what? I fucking took it. I was happy to take it, because no matter what, no matter how many Tuesday shifts I had to lose or how many late shifts I’d have to work without extra pay, I always knew that I would have a place at that plant, that there would always be an open space on the assembly line for me. Jack always said that. ‘We’ll always have a spot for you, Walt. As long as I’m here, you’ll never have to look for work a day in your life. Not after what you gave for your country.’ Where are those promises now, huh? What good are all those grand promises now that they’re leaving me without a leg and without a job, lying on the cutting room floor?”

Walter looked like he wanted to say more, but nothing came out. His hands and arms were shaking with frustration. Anne could see tears beginning to fall and felt sick with confusion. She could clearly see them trailing their way down his weather-beaten cheeks, sliding between the rigid gray stubble that lined his cheeks, but something in her mind was unable to comprehend the fact that her father was actually crying. She started to move toward him, but Liz was three steps ahead of her, already sliding out of her chair and striding over to their father to wrap him in her arms. He immediately rejected the hug, shrugging her off as soon as she had descended upon him, but then he reached out and lightly grabbed her hand. Anne found her footing and stumbled over to him, trying not to follow the table's example of balance, offering her own hand to him. He stared at it for a few moments, as if trying to figure out what it was that his eyes were seeing, before taking it with the same light touch that he had granted to Liz. They stood like that for a moment, saying nothing, linked together by their arms and their mutual fear and despair at what the future might hold. Then, Grandma Russell broke the spell: "I'm so sorry, Walter. I can't imagine what this must be like for you. I wish that we had some time to digest all this first, but I feel like I have to ask: what happens now? The three of you can't live on Anne's salary alone. I can lend you all some money if you start to run low, but..."

"No." Walter's voice was curt and final, refusing any arguments before one could be offered. "You're not lending us money. I appreciate the gesture, but I've been able to support this household by myself for almost twenty-five years, and I can handle this without any help."

Anne looked up to see Grandma Russell looking directly at her. They shared a knowing grimace. Everyone in that room knew that that wasn't true, that Anne's salary had been just as integral to keeping the house running over the past few years as Walter's, but now was definitely not the time to start raising that argument.

“Well, are there any other places around town like the plant? Places that’d be good for your skill set?”

Now it was Walter’s turn to grimace. “What, is that code for ‘disability?’ I have no idea. I never thought to check, not with Jack being so emphatic about that job setting me up for the long haul. There might be some places around town where I could get some steady work, but it would never come close to what I was making at the plant. That was a great job. A union job. They don’t have unions for something like sorting mail or working a cash register, and I sure as hell ain’t gonna be getting seven dollars an hour anywhere that would take a man with one leg.”

Grandma Russell didn’t have an answer for that, instead choosing to look down at the table and scratch at a small spot of hardened sauce on the wood.

“Everyone in town knows who you are, Dad,” Anne said. “Wouldn’t there be plenty of people willing to help you find a job?”

“*Pheh*,” Walter replied, a thin shower of spittle flying from his lips. He tapped his fist on what was left of his thigh as though he were knocking on a door that led to nowhere. “You underestimate the power of this damn thing. People around here don’t just know me; they *pity* me. Sure, they may talk big about how they ‘thank me for my service’ or how I ‘helped save the free world,’ but they still look down at my leg before they look at my face. They still think of me as that poor guy who lost his leg in the war, who got stuck in a wheelchair and doesn’t get to live like the rest of them. I could go up to anyone in this town and I’m sure they’d be oh *so* happy to try to find me a job, sure; but if any one of them happens to own a business or have anything to do with hiring at one, you sure as shit better know that they’re going to dance around the idea of offering me a job at their place as long as they can before I force them to cough up an excuse or come up with a way to lose my resumé in the trash. It doesn’t matter how strong that I tell them my work ethic is; they’re not gonna see anyone but a cripple, and to the working world, a cripple ain’t worth shit.”

“Come on, Dad, don’t say that,” Liz chimed in. “You’re not a cripple, you’re a hero. You gave something that you’ll never be able to get back to make sure that we were safe back here. You deserve more than to call yourself that, and anyone around here should be able to see that.”

Walter glanced up at his second-youngest daughter and cracked the briefest of smiles, squeezing her hand as he did so.

“Thanks, Lizzie. You always know what to say to make me feel better, even if it is all nonsense.”

Anne felt a pang of jealousy stab into her heart and resisted the urge to tighten her grip on her father’s hand. Here she was suggesting actual things they could do to tackle this situation before it became an emergency, and Liz was just spouting off a bunch of patriotic bullshit, but their dad loved her sister’s words, while hers usually just sent him into an annoyed, depressed spiral. Couldn’t he ever like something that she said? Just *once*, could he stop falling in love with every inane word to drip from between her sister’s honeyed lips and actually listen to what *she* had to say?

Jesus Christ, what’s wrong with me? My dad just lost his job and all I can think about is how jealous I am of Liz; am I really that selfish? Maybe he’s got a good reason to always listen to her after all, if this is how I react to something like this...

“Well, what’ll you do in the meantime?” Grandma Russell again, undoubtedly fully aware of what was going on inside Anne’s head.

Walter breathed deep, held the air in his lungs for a few moments, seeming to be trying to suck every last atom of oxygen from the atmospheric cocktail inside him, and then let it all out in a thick, trembling sigh. “I don’t know. I’ll start searching for jobs on Monday, since it’s not like I’d have any luck tomorrow. As far as what we’ll do until I get one and after, though, I’ve got no clue at all. Anne, do you think you could pick up some extra shifts at the diner? Would that make enough of a difference to help us keep things afloat for a while?”

Sure, as if I don't already work eight hours a day for five days a week only to come home to your crabby ass ordering me around everywhere before I'm even able to take off my nametag.

"Sure, Dad, I'm sure I can pick up some more time there over the next few weeks. As long as we don't spend too much outside of what we need to get through the week, we should be okay. Nothing more than a tight squeeze, right?"

Walter's eyes were glued to the floor, unmoving.

Liz and Anne looked at each other, fully aware of what that expression meant.

"Dad?" Liz asked, "What are you not telling us?"

He continued staring at the tiles below, suddenly engrossed by the way that the morning sun glinted on the dust-speckled linoleum. His remaining foot tapped on its stirrup on the wheelchair, creating a metallic clicking sound that was grating on the ears within moments.

Grandma Russell was looking straight at him, her gaze not wavering, and Anne tried to read her face to figure out what was passing between them, but to no avail.

"Come on, Walter. You've gotta tell them now. You can't hide something like this now that you don't have any way to get a steady paycheck for a while."

"Okay, okay, I'll tell them!" he yelled, throwing up his hands in defeat before dragging his right one down his face in frustration. His stubble whispered as his palm passed over it, seeming to join the succession of voices begging him to divulge his secrets.

"Okay, here's the thing. I haven't exactly been up front with you girls about our finances. A few months ago, after that surgery I had to get to remove the abnormal bone growth in my leg, I didn't exactly have enough lying around to cover the deductible, and that was when we were trying to fix the roof after that tree limb fell into the attic, so there wasn't really a slush fund lying around.. So, to get the money that I needed for the surgery, I took out a second mortgage on the house."

Anne's stomach turned into a dark, cold pit. Her knees began to shake, and she put her free hand on the table to make sure that she didn't run the risk of fainting for the second time that morning.

"You did what? Dad, how could you do something like that and not *tell* us about it? I'm the one who has to take care of you, for Christ's sake!"

"Hey! Don't you ever use the Lord's name in vain, young lady. And I don't care how old you are or what you do around this house: you are never allowed to talk to me in that tone under my own roof. Are we clear?"

"Really, Walter, is the best time for..."

"Ma, I will handle my own children as I see fit, and that's final. I said, Anne, are we clear?"

Anne gritted her teeth together, resisting the overwhelming urge to reach out and smack her father across the face. She gave everything she had to try to take care of him day in and day out, even bathing him when the occasion called for it, and this is the thanks she got?

"Yes, Dad. Perfectly clear."

Walter stared at her for a few more moments, seeming to dare her to talk back to him, before continuing on: "Anyway, if you must know, I did it because I am the man of this house and I'll be damned if one of you had to go bankrupt to pay for my surgery."

One of us? You say that like the other one here even has enough money of her own to get a haircut, let alone pay a hospital bill...

"Now, however, I guess we're all going to suffer for it."

"Walter, you know that there's no way you're going to be able to pay that off without a job, at least not without some extremely fancy talkin' whenever someone from the bank comes a-knockin'. You're gonna need another source of income."

"Well, how the hell are we gonna get that? Anne, are you able to work two jobs?"

Grandma Russell glared at him. “I was thinking more along the lines of Elizabeth getting a job.”

Liz’s head wrenched around to stare daggers at Grandma Russell, who met her granddaughter’s steely gaze with a look that would wither roses in the height of spring. Liz was instantly cowed and put her head back down, but Walter came to her defense immediately:

“Ma, we’re not gonna force Liz to get a job to support this family. She’s got enough to worry about as it is, with trying to figure out college and all that.”

She graduated six years ago, you’d think it’s time she finally settled on something, Anne thought with venom in her blood.

“Well, Anne certainly can’t work two jobs. She’s being ground to the bone as it is between those shifts at the diner and trying to keep you afloat, and we both know that *I* can’t be here every minute of the day to help out.” She looked directly at Liz as she emphasized ‘I,’ but the significance of her remark was lost upon both father and daughter.

“You’re right, I couldn’t ask that of you,” Walter said, grasping his chin in his hand as though he were contemplating the nature of the universe. “But what else is there?”

All were silent for a minute, searching their minds for a way to pull them away from the seemingly unavoidable chasm that had opened up before them with Walter’s announcement. Then, Anne’s face lit up. She had an idea.

“Why don’t we rent out some of the rooms upstairs?”

The entire group turned to her, saying nothing, urging her to continue with their eyes.

“We’ve got the guest bedroom, and now that Mary doesn’t live here anymore, her room is empty. We could find some people looking for a temporary place to live who could rent the rooms upstairs for a while. As long as we make sure that they’re not creeps and that they’d have enough room up there, we could make a good bit of money off of that.”

Walter was staring at her with skepticism in his eyes, and seemed to be preparing to unleash a critique that would leave her scheme dead in the water, but Grandma Russell jumped in before he could get a word out: “Oh, Annie, that’s simply *perfect*! I do declare that I could never have come up with a better plan than that myself. Don’t y’all think that sounds like a lovely idea?”

Liz was nodding her head enthusiastically, seeming to just be happy that she had evaded a call to get a job once again, but Walter still appeared to need some convincing.

“Who would we even invite to stay here? Bismarck isn’t exactly overflowing with tourists or new residents.”

Anne had already come up with an answer to that one. “Liz and I can always head to somewhere like Fort Wayne or South Bend to see if we could find someone looking for a reasonably-priced room. I bet the bigger cities would have plenty of takers if we can’t find someone here.”

“Anne, I dunno; inviting random people in from the city seems like a bad idea to me. You never know what they may be like. They could be some kind of creep who would spy on you girls at night, or they could be a closet communist! I wouldn’t invite someone like that into this house if FDR himself rolled up to my doorstep and told me to.”

Anne’s eyes rolled so far up into her head that she swore she could feel her optic nerve straining not to break. “Dad, we can have you meet with them before they actually come to live here. I’m not saying we just pull the first people we see off the street and set them up with a room.”

“I think it’s a good idea, too,” Liz said. Anne stared at her, eyes wide, shocked to hear words of affirmation coming from her sister at all, let alone in the face of criticism from their father. “We’re gonna need some good money fast, and this could be a nice way to do it. Plus it might be fun to have some new people around this house; it could liven things up around here.”

Anne smiled and chuckled. “You do know you can meet new people by just stepping out the front door, right?”

Liz smirked back at her, then stuck her tongue out while going cross-eyed, sending the both of them into a fit of laughter.

“Look, girls, this isn’t some joke!” The fell silent, wishing that the light tone of the room had been able to stay longer. “I’ve lived in this house since I was a little boy. My grandfather built it from the ground up with his brother and my grandmother. Letting some strangers come in from nowhere and set up shop in the bedrooms where my grandparents, my parents, my siblings, and I all spent our lives isn’t something that I can just do on a whim. I’ll need time to think about this.”

“Walter, you don’t have time.” Grandma Russell’s voice was becoming sharp, warning Walter of an impending explosion. “What you have is a firing notice and a second mortgage that’s been barely paid off. You can’t sponge off of Anne’s salary; she works too hard and too long to give you the support that she already does. This tenant idea is a great one, and while I understand your trepidation, you *cannot* call yourself the man of this house if you’re gonna let an opportunity like that one pass you by. Now, quit beating around the bush, pull yourself together, and *tell Anne that it’s a good idea.*

Walter’s face was the mask of a petulant child, a ten-year-old who applied to his mother to make a friend give a toy back only to be dismissed by the lesson that sharing is caring. He looked back and forth between Liz, Grandma Russell, and Anne, almost pleading for someone to tell him that he was right, his concerns were the top priority, they would take every complaint that he had raised seriously and come to the conclusion that it was just impossible to accept anyone from outside the family as someone to live with in that house, but he found no quarter among the women who surrounded him. He had been outvoted, and he knew there was no overcoming the united support of his daughters and his mother-in-law.

“Okay, fine,” he said, throwing his hands up in defeat. “We’ll start looking for tenants on Monday, just like I’ll start looking for new jobs I can take. But I’m gonna be thoroughly vetting all the people who show and interest in this place, and you better believe that if any of them even say something close to creepy or pinko, they’re getting thrown out with a boot mark on their little red asses.”

Anne, Liz, and Grandma Russell smiled at each other. They had done it. He would never let them hear the end of it, but they had still managed to get through a skull thicker than the Hoover Dam.

“And I’m gonna show preference to military men,” he added. “No damn draft-dodgers are even setting foot on our grass without getting the hounds sent after ‘em.”

Liz, whose face had twitched when Walter mentioned draft dodging, looked at her father in confusion. “Dad? We don’t have any dogs.”

Walter looked up at her with sudden cocksure bravado. “No, honey I mean *these* hounds!” he declared, popping his fists up into a fighting position and swaying back and forth in his chair like a deranged boxer. The room dissolved into laughter again, this time permanently, and as the sun climbed higher and heated the breezes still flitting through the kitchen window.

At this point in the novel, there will be chapters further establishing the dynamic between the characters already introduced and exploring the family of Anne’s sister, Mary, who is the only sibling not living with the rest of the family. She and her husband are described in Appendix I. Benny Crane will then arrive, establish a rapport with Walter over their shared experiences in war, and begin to settle in. He recommends another tenant to Walter, who Walter agrees to meet, which leads into the next two chapters.

Arrival

When Anne shuffled out of her room the next morning, surprisingly, she seemed to be the only one up. She could hear her father snoring in the bedroom opposite, and Liz's door was still closed, so it looked like she would have the house to herself for a morning. Smiling at the thought, she strolled over to the stairs with an extra sprightliness to her step. She wondered when the last time was that she had gotten a moment to herself in the morning, especially when she had to go in for the day shift (as her father and sister had an uncanny way of dumping as many tasks as possible upon her whenever she had to leave the house at a set time). She half tip-toed, half hopped down the stairs and turned into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee, only to see Benny Crane sitting at the kitchen table in a royal blue robe with a steaming cup already in hand.

"Morning!" he said, chipper beyond belief, when he saw Anne walk in. She groaned inside, but tried not to let her mild annoyance show through, giving him a tired peace sign in response.

"There's still plenty of coffee in the pot. I hope you don't mind that I went ahead and used it; after I got back I never really got used to sleeping in, so I'm usually up before everyone else. At the time of day when drinking coffee is about the only thing you can do without pissing everyone else off." He chuckled to himself in a way that almost seemed self-absorbed, but still managed to come across as innocent and dad-like. Anne couldn't help but warm to him a little bit.

"Hey, just as long as there's some ready for me when I get down here, I'm fine with you making the coffee every single day that you're here."

He laughed at that, which struck her as odd, since she hadn't been that funny, but maybe he was just one of those people with an endless rechargeable battery of good humor plugged into their brains. *Please tell me where I can pick up one of those, preferably on sale; I bet anything that helps you get through a morning like this would be way too expensive.*

She walked over to the coffee pot and pulled down a mug, one of those cheesy tourist gag ones: “My parents went to Lake Michigan and all they got me was this crappy mug,” all in big, garish orange letters. She had actually bought it for herself; both Liz and her father thought it was one of the ugliest things in the whole house—which was something coming from the owner of that war crime of a recliner in the living room—but something about it just spoke to her. She was sure that the pure irritation that it sparked in her relatives only added to the enjoyment she got out of it. She poured a thick black stream of coffee into it, watching the leftover grounds swirl inside the pot as she did so, and when she set the pot back down and took a sip, she nearly gagged.

“Yeah, sorry, I tend to make it a little strong,” Benny said.

“Yeah, like Russia’s a little big,” Anne coughed out, and Benny let loose a guffaw followed by an immediate guilty expression, since he had forgotten how to modulate the volume of his voice. “It’s fine, don’t worry about it. I’ll just add some extra milk and a little sugar.”

Benny’s expression relaxed, and Anne smiled back disarmingly. *He’s just trying to be nice. What’s the harm in making a pot of coffee that could take down Mubammad Ali? It’s not like he had any idea how anybody here drinks it. Maybe I could convince Liz to give it a taste...*

“So, what’s your plan for today?”

“Oh, nothing much. Snatch as much enjoyment as I can out of the next few hours before I have to go to work,” Anne said as she reached into the fridge for a bottle of milk. *Wait, nope, that’s buttermilk, better keep looking.*

“Ah, the old assembly line. Where do you work? Are you at the plant like your dad was?”

So he had told Benny about that. *Well of course he did, how would he have gotten through this whole process without letting the guy know why they were renting rooms in the first place?* “No, I’m a hostess over at that French place on 5th, Chez Fromage. Have you been there?”

“Uh, no... Say, about that name...”

“Don’t even ask. The guy that runs it basically flipped through a French cookbook and picked the first word that he stuck his finger on. He thinks it makes the restaurant sound fancy.”

“Oh, definitely!” Benny adjusted an imaginary coat and held an invisible monocle to his eye before launching into a thick caricature of a British aristocrat: “I *say*, my darling, that eatery sounds positively *dashing*. I may not have ever been there, but I can tell just from that name that it must be *the* establishment for fine dining in the vicinity, for there are certainly no other restaurants known as the ‘House of Cheese’ for *miles* around...”

Now it was Anne’s turn to laugh. Benny abandoned the character to stand up and take a couple bows, blowing kisses to a fake audience and miming a humble stage performer.

“You’re certainly in a good mood this morning,” she said, pouring milk into her mug until it was almost over the rim. She reached for the sugar, which sat atop the Kenmore in a miniature Tupperware container. She didn’t even bother with a spoon, but simply dumped a cascade of it into the swirling potion of black and tan. She reached into the mug and stirred with her finger as Benny returned to his seat.

“Well, why wouldn’t I be? It’s a lovely day today!”

Anne looked out the window. Thick, slate-gray clouds hung low in the sky as rain pelted the earth below. Potholes in the street had already turned into miniature lakes, and their lawn, its growth still stunted by the memory of winter, looked to be a soup of mud and leftover leaves from the fall.

“Um...are we seeing the same thing out there?” she asked, taking a sip of her coffee and stifling a grimace.

Benny smiled again and threw his hand out in an “aw, shucks” gesture. “Oh, I know it’s pretty dismal out there, but I don’t let that get in the way of enjoying the day! You gotta look on the bright side, ya know?”

Anne scoffed, unable to help herself, which caused some coffee to slosh out of her mug, covering her feet in a small, hot puddle. The legs of her pajama pants began soaking it up as she stood there in bland surprise.

“Ope! Here, lemme get that,” Benny said, shooting out of his chair and moving toward the roll of paper towels standing free on the counter by the sink. Anne put her mug back on the counter, sending more coffee out onto the Formica as she did so, and shooed him away as she went for them herself.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it. I’m closer, anyway, it’s my mess.”

Benny glanced back at the towels, almost as though they called to him, but then shrugged and returned to his seat.

“Sorry; I tend to be a little over helpful. My wife says it’s endearing, but I’m sure that it gets on her nerves more than she lets on.”

“She’s an American hero,” Anne said as she tore a few towels loose and began drying herself off. Benny laughed again, but this time seemed to have a far-off look in his eye, as though he was only here in the general sense but, within himself, was somewhere else. “So is your wife coming to stay here, too?” she asked as she moved to wipe the puddle on the floor.

Benny stared off into the corner for a moment before seeming to come back into himself and realize that he had had a question directed to him. “Uh, yeah, she’ll be staying here, too. She should be getting here soon; I came here to get everything arranged and get a feel for the house while she stayed behind to pack up the last of our stuff and close out the sale on our house.”

That took Anne by surprise. “If you both had a house, then why are you moving in here? Sorry if that’s pushing too much.”

“No, no, you’re fine, don’t worry,” he said, but she thought that she could hear the sun in his voice dim. “We just lived beyond our means for too long, and we realized that we should

downsize if we were to keep our heads above water. Most of our stuff is in storage, but we sold off some of the more valuable things that we didn't have too much of an attachment to and, while we look for a more affordable home, we decided to find a place to rent. And, wouldn't ya know, you guys put an ad in the paper just a couple days after we started looking! But anyways, enough of that sad talk, no need for that first thing in the morning. It's a great day so far, no reason to make it all sad and depressed-like!"

Anne hadn't thought the story particularly depressing; in fact, she could relate, and it was nice to see that Benny wasn't all the bucket of sunshine that he appeared to be at first; but, he obviously wasn't going to go any deeper, so she let it go. "Yeah, aside from the coffee and the sky it hasn't been too dark this morning. Especially not with these walls," she said as she moved to clean up the mess on the countertop, glancing at white wallpaper with orange flowers so bright that one could almost wonder where the batteries were attached. Benny guffawed again, but immediately clapped a hand over his mouth when they both heard stirring from upstairs.

"Sorry," he mouthed, and Anne smiled to tell him that it was okay.

"But yeah, Ellie and Freddy should be coming along later today, and hopefully we'll be all moved in and settled by the end of the night."

Anne froze and felt her heart twinge for a moment upon hearing the second name.

"Freddy?" she said, tentatively, throwing the paper towels in the trash can. "Who's that?"

"Oh, sorry, did your dad not tell you about him? He's an old buddy of mine; we go way back. You're gonna love him, I promise. Great guy, wouldn't hurt a fly. He'll be taking the other room; he was also looking for a place to rent and I referred him to your dad as soon as we finished our own deal."

Phen, she thought. *Can't be that Freddy, then, if they're old friends. Why would I have thought that they were the same person? Why would he even have met that Freddy, let alone be best friends with him? Stupid, stupid. You do know the world isn't all centered around you, right?*

"Oh, okay. Dad mentioned that he had gotten another person to take the other room; he just didn't tell me their name. I'm sure he'll live up to the impossibly high bar you're setting for him."

Benny chuckled this time, being careful to watch his volume. "Believe me, you'll love him. Hopefully they get here soon; every hour without Ellie around is like a morning without any coffee. Speaking of which, are you gonna drink yours? It'll get cold just sitting there like that."

That was when Anne realized that she hadn't taken a single drink since she first put everything in the mug. *Whoops*. "Oh, yeah, I tend to just let it cool for a while. Paranoid about burning my tongue."

Benny gave an exaggerated, knowing nod, as though she had just shared a deep secret with him and implored him never to tell a soul. She picked up the mug to sip again. It wasn't cold, but it was lukewarm, the temperature at which good coffee becomes mediocre and bad coffee begins to enter the territory of patently undrinkable. This time, she couldn't hide the distaste on her face, but Benny hadn't seemed to notice. *Well, at least I can escape soon enough*, she thought, surprised at the fact that, for the first time in she didn't know how long, she actually felt ready to go to work.

"Corner hot!"

Anne on instinct flattened herself against the wall as her assistant manager, Darren, rushed out of the kitchen, his hands occupied by a plate carrying a sauce dish overflowing with ranch dressing. She would never understand why people coming to a French restaurant would put ranch of all things on their food, but, she guessed, at a Midwestern French restaurant in a town of 20,000

people, anything was possible. She continued on her path to the kitchen, where the three cooks were working like an assembly line, putting together bowls of greasy French onion soup, platters of gristly beef and stale potatoes masquerading as steak frites, and piles of lettuce soaked in a lake of French dressing with a speed that was impressive, but still unable to meet the satisfaction of at least half of the aging, impatient, coupon-wielding customers who shuffled into the restaurant on Sunday afternoons after a hearty helping of Jesus and coffee. She walked past the dishwasher, who was once again trying to find the source of a leak that had confounded every single plumber brought in to stop it, and let herself into her boss's office, where he was in a vitriolic argument with what sounded like a newspaper food critic.

"I don't care what you think you saw, I'm telling you that there are no rats in this restaurant!" he growled into the phone, his fingers tightening on the edge of the splintery, stained counter running the length of the office that served as a mediocre desk. She heard some angry electronic chatter from the other end of the line, then, "Well you can take your rat and shove it up your ass, because we do not have any rats here and never will!" He slammed the phone down and bent over the counter breathing deeply, trying to calm himself.

Shit.

"Um, Mr. Schreiner?"

He tensed up, obviously wanting to whirl around and vent all of his rage about the critic on her, but he was able to restrain himself, squeezing his words one at a time through his tobacco-stained teeth. "What is it, Anne?"

"The people at table two are asking for a refund. They say that one of the people at the table is allergic to walnuts and that they could have been seriously hurt by the apple walnut salad that they got, so they're demanding their money back.

His hands began to shake and grow white as he gripped the counter as hard as he possibly could. “Then WHY did they GET an APPLE-WALNUT SALAD delivered to their table? Who is the fucking NITWIT who did THAT?”

Anne stifled the urge to speed away as quickly as possible. “We gave them one because one of the people at the table ordered it, sir. Jamie clearly heard them order one and has it written down on her pad.”

Mr. Schreiner was silent for a moment, then grabbed a nearby pencil holder and threw it against the wall. Pencils cascaded onto the floor and counter, flying like shrapnel. Anne wanted to be anywhere but there, but she knew that if she left now she wouldn’t be able to get her time card from him for at least another half hour, judging from how the conversation with the walnut family was about to shake out, so she had to stand her ground.

“Fine,” he said, his voice filled with anger and resignation. “I’ll take care of this. Anything else?”

“Um, yeah, I need my time card. My shift ended ten minutes ago.”

Schreiner yanked his overfilled key ring from his back pocket and shoved a small golden one into a filing cabinet on his left, turning it in the lock with such force that Anne thought he might break it. He pulled it back out and simply said, “Fine, get out,” before stalking off through the kitchen to fight the third customer battle of the afternoon. She stepped into his office and took her time card out of the drawer. As she filled it out, she wondered if Ellie and Freddy would be there when she got home and what they would be like. Would Ellie be just as chipper and upbeat as her husband? That was doubtful, but she didn’t want his total opposite; she got enough of that as it was from her father. And then there was the mysterious Freddy; what would he be like? She hadn’t gotten any clues from Benny about his personality, other than that he “wouldn’t hurt a fly” (*everyone says that until they’ve got a fly buzzing around their heads and make a mad dash for the swatter*), but she hoped

he wouldn't be too obtrusive. And who knows, maybe he'd be nice to get along with. Or he could be a bitter, vindictive old man and simply be a clone of her father to double her likelihood of going insane. The latter would probably be how it went; she was lucky like that.

She put her time card back in the drawer and speed-walked out the back of the restaurant, booking it to her Studebaker Lark at the other end of the parking lot, wanting to be off the premises before the shouting began in the house and she had the possibility of being called back out and dragged into the fight that would inevitably start with the old woman who had ordered the salad. She turned on the radio, which yielded the wild, raw voice of Robert Plant, and cranked it before pulling out and zooming out of the lot.

As she drove home, she glanced out her windows at the shell of the Chrysler plant as she passed, its closed garages and empty grounds seeming forlorn and diseased. The rusty smokestack that rose above the plant and that had always belched a thick cloud of white gasses into the atmosphere for as long as she could remember now stood dead and breathless against the April sky. She had only been inside twice, and only remembered it as a maze of machines and heat, but she couldn't help but feel nostalgic for all she had gotten from it, even if she had never set foot beyond its doors after the age of ten. She continued on in silence as the radio cycled between the alternating voices of Steven Tyler, Roger Daltrey, and Bon Scott, feeling the gnawing unease and fear of an uncertain future making ragged the edges of her composure and sanity, trying to tear at her stability and turn her into a younger version of her father. *Jesus Christ, can you imagine?* she thought as she pulled into her driveway. *That'll be the last fucking thing I ever do.*

She got out of her car and slammed the door. She realized that her chest felt tight as she walked up to the porch, and she stopped and closed her eyes to take a couple deep breaths before continuing on to open the front door. As she reached for the knob with shaking hands, however,

the door opened on its own to reveal Liz standing there with a worried and disgusted look on her face.

“Uh, Liz, what’s...”

“Just shut up and be ready. You’ve got no idea who’s in there.”

What the hell?

“Yeah, it’s Benny’s wife and his friend, right?”

“Oh yeah, his *friend* is here, all right...”

Anne was about to ask more, but Liz staked away and up the stairs without another word.

Anne entered the house and shut the door with trepidation. From the way Liz had talked it sounded like he was a combination murderer-child molester-Richard Nixon type.

When she turned the corner into the kitchen and saw her father sitting with Benny and a woman she assumed to be Benny’s wife. Across the table from them was her former fiancé, Freddy Henderson, his skin like polished mahogany in the sunlight, a small scar beneath his right eye, and all the little details she remembered about him on full display as the memories of their four years together came crashing into her brain like a tsunami. She felt her heart drop clear through the floor as her skin turned to ice.

“Perfect,” she muttered.

Confrontation

After Anne's whispered sarcasm hit the floor, silence hung in the kitchen like a putrid carcass. Her father leaned back in his chair, looking at Anne with a look simultaneously guilty and annoyed. Benny's face scrunched up as though he thought he were about to conjure a puddle of vomit onto the dingy kitchen linoleum. Ellie looked between all of them, her expression worried but curious. Then there was Freddy, who refused to meet her eyes at all. He stared at the sun glinting off the floor as if it were as beautiful as when it shone through an autumn tree. His hands shook like a needle on a seismometer; she could tell he was digging his fingers into his legs to stop them from being noticeable. She remembered that about him.

Anne herself couldn't decide who to look at. Benny offered no help, she didn't know what to think of her father yet for bringing Freddy back into the house, and every time she tried to look at Freddy her eyes seemed to glance away like a sword grazing plate armor. She wanted to be able to look at him without breaking a gaze, to let her eyes take him in without her heart pounding hard enough to break out of her chest, to not know the reason for the shaking of his hands or that his right eyelid was twitching with nerves, but all of these desires were futile. She could feel her own legs beginning to wobble, and she reached out to the door frame to steady herself.

The playful screams of children wafted in through the open kitchen window. *Lucky bastards*, Anne thought. *All they have to worry about is not getting hit when crossing the street.*

The silence continued, almost seeming to solidify and take on a mass of its own in the air, until Benny took a stab at breaking it: "Oh gosh, look at the time! We should probably start unpacking if we want to be settled in before we got to bed."

Anne looked at the novelty Coca-Cola clock on the wall. It was 4:30 in the afternoon.

"Ellie, you feel like coming up and unpacking with me?"

She definitely didn't, Anne presumed, judging from the way her gaze was flicking back and forth between everyone else in the room like a scientist flipping between lenses in a microscope. Benny put his hand on her shoulder and visibly squeezed a couple times, and then Ellie seemed to realize that his request wasn't voluntary.

"Oh, uh, yeah, we should probably get a head start on that. Let's head up."

She stood, and they both left the kitchen, Benny fast-walking and Ellie strolling, trying to keep her attention in the room as long as possible in case something interesting happened. Anne could hear their footsteps hurrying up the stairs as they whispered to each other. It was too quiet for her to hear clearly, but something in their mumbled words sounded accusatory and unpleasant.

And then there were three.

"I think that I should go, too." The basso rumble of that voice echoing through the kitchen made something deep inside her shiver; she was not sure whether it was out of delight or anxiety. Goosebumps spread across her skin as a chill flashed through her body. When had she last heard that voice? Was it right before he had hopped on the plane? No, no, it was earlier than that; it was when they had been sitting in a cafe in the airport, trying to choke down the stale, tasteless slabs of bread and watery, bland slices of tomato and lettuce that passed for sandwiches there. They had been eating mostly in silence. After Freddy had pushed the last chunk of the soggy, cold mess of a meal into his mouth and swallowed, that same voice had emerged from his throat and cut straight through the generic chatter of the airport: "You know, I'm really not looking forward to the mosquitoes."

She had almost choked on her sandwich with a snort meant to be a laugh. After she had recovered, hitting herself in the chest a few times to make sure that everything was clear, she said, "Are you serious? That's your biggest concern?"

He had looked at her in a teasing way, as though he knew that she was justified but he wanted to make her think that his concern was an obvious one. “Well, yeah. It’s all hot, wet jungle there, can you imagine just how many mosquitoes there are over there? They must get entire swarms of them during the night! I can’t stand the thought of being sucked dry by those things. Plus what if they give me malaria or something? Yuck.”

Anne had chuckled, and Freddy’s mouth had widened into a smile, his bright teeth glinting in the afternoon sun. Freddy wasn’t much for appearances, but he had always cared about his teeth. It was a point of pride (almost intolerably so sometimes) with him that he had never had a cavity, braces, or a tooth pulled. Now that his wisdom teeth were fully coming in, he could finally stop worrying about breaking the streak for their sake.

“I’ll never get you, Freddy. I never thought I’d be marrying the type of guy more afraid of little bugs than bullets flying at him.”

“*Lots* of little insects. Millions of them. Do you want a dry, bloodless husk getting sent back with express shipping? Anne’s face gave an exaggerated grimace for comedic effect. “Yeah, I didn’t think so.”

Then he had leaned back so far that his chair had tipped over, and she had rushed over to help, knocking over her own chair and an open bottle of water as she moved, only compounding the mess and sending them both laughing. They were both far from laughing now, but a part of her was already longing for the same carefree guffaws that had so freely launched themselves from their throats that day.

“Yeah, I think that’s probably a good idea for now.” Her dad had spoken for the first time that day, shifting in his wheelchair and scratching his leg with the distinct air of someone who didn’t know what else to do with his body. “You wanna come back again tomorrow morning to start getting things in here?”

Anne's face colored, and her core temperature rose about ten degrees. *Excuse me, what?*

"Yeah, same time, same time." His eyes rose to meet those of her father, and she thought that she could see a slight softening of the expression on her father's face before the moment was gone. *Really? You're sympathizing with him right now? Hello, did you forget that your own daughter, the woman that was supposed to marry him at one point in her life, is standing right fucking here?!?! But then it was gone* and Freddy was striding toward her his eyes locked on the ground once again. He strode right past her, almost bumping into her as he went, and headed straight for the door. As he swung it open and stepped out, he glanced back one last time, and, for a moment, his chocolate brown eyes and her forest green ones connected, sending an electrical current and a hot wave of shame springing up the channels of her already strained nervous system. Then the door was shut and it was like he had never been there, except for the lingering scent of an unfamiliar cologne.

She turned back to her father, who was meeting her with an uncertain expression.

"All right, fine, I know what you're gonna say..."

That did it.

"Oh, no Dad, I don't think you do. I think that you're too blindly focused on yourself right now to know how anyone, even your own daughter, is feeling or about to say right now. Did you even think twice before tearing the rug out from under me like that? Was it worth any deliberation whether I might be oh, you know, slightly uncomfortable with the idea of my ex-fiancé even being in town at all, let alone sitting at my kitchen table with my dad and discussing moving into our house?! Or are you too selfish to even bother to think about things like that?"

Walter's face grew red; all the guilt in it was instantly replaced by pure anger, and Anne knew that she had gone too far.

"Excuse me? What did you say, young lady?"

Anne's passion of seconds before was already waning away. "Y-you heard me."

Walter wheeled up to her with frightening speed, his aging chair squeaking like a rusty park swing with the effort. Anne was two feet taller than he when he was sitting down, and she could barely remember him out of the chair at all, but his anger always made him feel as though he towered over her. She had never been able to stand up to him when she was a kid, and even now, when she was only three years from thirty and by all rights fully able to address him as a fellow adult rather than just a father figure, she internally cowered whenever he raised his voice for everything but mundane day-to-day demands.

“You want to call me selfish? Really? Me?! I have slaved away for years to try to give you girls everything that you deserve! I’ve wheeled myself through the doors of that plant day after day, week after week, year after year, sitting on an assembly line and doing the same repetitive tasks for hours on end in a shit ton of noise and sparks and fumes, only to come home and take the both of you in my arms and try to fill the roles of both a father and a mother to you both! Do you know how hard that’s been for me? I try not to ask too much; it’s not like I’m making you wait on me hand and foot. I just wanna be able to enjoy the rest of my years as much as possible with you girls. Don’t I deserve that? After all the years that I’ve slaved away for the two of you, don’t you think that, in my time of need, I deserve the support of the two of you on this, no matter who walks through that door to live in our bedroom? Don’t you?!”

Anne had thought of at least a dozen responses to that speech as he ranted on, but she couldn’t bring herself to vocalize any of them. All she could do was stare back at Walter’s sweating, angry, weather-beaten face.

“Look, Annie. I know this isn’t exactly the ideal situation. I know that this won’t be easy for you. I dunno what the hell is wrong with Lizzie, she’s got no reason to be so pissed off with ‘im. But I don’t wanna hear a peep outta you about this, okay? We’re in debt. I don’t have a job. Lizzie doesn’t have a job. You’re the only one still working in this house, and it isn’t exactly like you’re

bringing in an income fit for a whole family. So you're gonna have to suck it up and take it for at least the next six months or so, okay? Can you do that for your old man?"

Anne wanted to cry out in anger, in rage, in frustration, to smack her father across the face and unload on him all the festering emotional baggage that had built up between them over the years and force him to call Freddy at wherever he was staying right this minute to tell him that he couldn't stay here and that he would have to move on to the next house, the next town, the next state, and to get out of their lives forever. She wanted to tell him that since she had been running the house for the last five years and that all Walter did with his money was indulge her deadbeat older sister, that she should have just as much of a say in this case. She wanted to tell him to go to hell and roll him right out the door. But she didn't do any of these things. In the end, when Anne found her voice, the only thing that she could muster was, "Fine."

Walter looked somewhat surprised; he had apparently been expecting a bigger fight than he had gotten. "Well, good," he said. "Now, he'll be officially moving in in a couple of days, so when that rolls around I don't wanna have this argument again. Now, I'm gonna watch TV. The local news is about to come on." He rolled himself over to the puce armchair and started the process of transferring himself from seat to seat, the adrenaline that he had felt during the argument propelling him from one to the other with uncharacteristic ease and speed. Anne, meanwhile, only stood there, watching him. Part of her mind was still struggling against the mental block that had flown up the second that he had come at her from the kitchen table, longing to say everything that she had ever wanted to say to him both now and through the years, but she knew that she had lost. Even if she came back with those arguments now, they wouldn't carry any weight and would do nothing but make the two of them even angrier. She had caved. He had won.

She slunk up the stairs in silence as Walter turned on the news. She heard that they were going to have one of their first days of the year with temperatures breaking 80 degrees tomorrow,

but she couldn't find it in her heart to be excited about the heat. Instead of conjuring thoughts of relaxing in the yard with a book or running through the streets as a child, it only pulled up another memory of Freddy. A few months before the debate about the mosquitoes, they had been strolling through downtown hand-in-hand, making the rounds of the "shopping district" that consisted of a couple jewelry stores, a used bookstore, and three clothing stores that all sold variations of each others' products. The heat had been beating down that day, even as the sun set below the corn-stippled horizon, and it was a relief to step into Kleiner's Jewels and feel the soothing caress of central air conditioning. They had looked up and down the shelves, mostly pretending for the sake of acting like they weren't inside just for the cool air (since the owner, John Kleiner, was at the counter, and he never liked people to be in the store if they didn't at least have the intention of buying something), but Anne had come across a pair of earrings that she had genuinely loved: two small studs made of rose gold and a new material called cubic zirconia, on sale for only three dollars. She didn't even have to say anything before Freddy was looking at her and pointing at them, saying that they'd be perfect for her.

Freddy had walked over to Kleiner and asked him to take them out of the case; he was going to buy them for his girl. They walked back to the counter with Kleiner, and exchanged a loving, happy glance that was shattered when Kleiner said, "That'll be seven dollars."

Freddy had turned to Kleiner, a frown on his face. "What? The sign said it was only three."

Kleiner's face had been stolid, unmoving, brooking no insight into the state of his mind. "I told you it's seven, so it's seven."

"What are you talking about, man, it says those are on sale for three dollars!"

Kleiner was silent for a moment. "Sale just ended yesterday. Haven't taken down the signs yet."

"Oh, come on, man, you've gotta be kidding me..."

“Look, you can either pay me the seven dollars or get out of my shop.”

Anne had felt the ire rising in her stomach, and she could feel that indignation even now as she slipped into her room and flung herself onto her bed, thinking about when she had jumped in and said, “What the hell is wrong with you? You know that those are only three dollars, so why are you trying to jump up the price?”

Kleiner hadn’t given an answer; he had just looked at the both of them, daring them to challenge him further.

“Fine, whatever,” Anne had said. “Those earrings look like shit anyway. Come on, Freddy, let’s go.”

She had grabbed Freddy’s hand and started to move away, but Freddy hadn’t gone. He was locked in a staring contest with Kleiner, neither man backing down. She could feel the rising tension in the room like a rubber band pulled too tight, ready to snap any second.

“Come on, Freddy, this pig’s not worth it.”

Kleiner hadn’t seemed to register the insult at all. Freddy’s muscles were growing ever more taut, and for a moment she thought that he was going to hit the guy, but then he relaxed slightly and let her take him out of the store. When they had emerged, the heat seemed even more oppressive than it had when they had gone in, sinking through their clothes and sticking to them like tar. They looked back into the store, where Kleiner was still staring at them, one of his hands now resting on the phone that sat upon the counter. They had walked away in the direction that they had come, both heading back for Freddy’s car without making any explicit decision to do so. When they reached his Ford LTD and slid inside, they still hadn’t talked. Freddy pulled out and, without them discussing it, began driving her home. As they had begun to approach her house, however, she had finally broken the silence by asking, “Why didn’t you say something about the way that guy was

acting? That was horrible of him, trying to jack up the price like that as soon as he saw you. You should've gone off on him."

Freddy had turned to her, and she could tell that he was debating what to say next even as he opened his mouth to begin speaking. "Anne...I've been dealing with people like that asshole all my life. They get one look at how dark my skin is, and all of a sudden sales are over, or the table that I request is always reserved, little things like that all over the place. I have spoken up, and I have told people like him off, plenty of times. Now, though; I'm not happy about having to go to Vietnam. I don't agree with it at all, I don't want to have to kill anyone, I don't want to have to be away from you so long and not know if I'll ever get to see you again. But I guess, if there's one saving grace in all this, it's that I get to get away from small-town creeps like him for awhile. I won't have to worry about every time I walk in somewhere there being a chance that I might have to pay double what everyone around me is paying, or that I'll get shoved into a corner for no reason. Hopefully, over there, nobody'll worry what color my skin is when we're getting shot at."

Lying on her bed now, her face buried in her pillow, Anne thought back to that summer night and all the nights before and after it which had been filled with Freddy's calming, beautiful presence, wishing that she didn't have to think about him and still relishing the memories, both the good and the bad. She thought about all the nights she had been in just this position, wondering what was happening to him all those thousands of miles away, wishing that they could be together no matter where they were on Earth. Then she began to remember sitting at her desk opposite the bed, a fountain pen in hand, a piece of blank stationery in front of her, its surface stained with two small drops of saltwater as she began to write the words that she had never thought would come from her own fingertips.

Anne cut that train of thought off as abruptly as she could by screaming into her pillow, feeling tears welling up in her eyes. She knew that her family needed someone else to stay here, and

she knew that Freddy would be a perfect houseguest. She never wanted to turn him away like Kleiner and so many others had done. Just seeing his face in her mind's eye, however, looking back at that momentary gaze that they had shared as he walked out the front door not long ago, sent a spear of pain through her heart. Hating Freddy, hating her father, hating herself for hating both of them, she realized just how wide the gulf between her and Freddy had grown.

As Freddy begins to settle in at the Johnson household, things are extremely tense. Anne avoids him at all costs, spending more and more time at Mary's, and, while Walter begins to bond with him again, Grandma Russell and Lisa are both skeptical, Lisa because she hates Vietnam veterans and Grandma Russell because she never liked him in the first place (which is revealed later to be because she is racist, a fact that Anne never realized as a kid since Grandma Russell hid it well and most of the people in her town are white). Anne soon realizes that she cannot spend all her time with Mary and Charlie, though, as the atmosphere in their home is suffocating, and begins to hang out with her friends Hattie and Lisa often to keep out of the house. Freddy, however, who has helped to repair their relationship a small bit by this point, catches her going out with them, and, since he knew Hattie in high school, asks to tag along. This leads to a day when they visit a local amusement park; the following chapter takes place during that day.

Ghosts

Anne reached up and wiped a thin film of sweat off the back of her neck. The June sun was relentless, beating down on her skin like a migraine. She could almost feel it burning her pale skin, turning it red, making it peel and blister, turning the cells from perfect to cancerous, all because she was determined to get this corn dog. She had been standing in line for thirty minutes now, and she was sure that the food that she got would not be nearly worth the lengthy wait in the painful sun, but at this point she had invested too much time in the line to just up and leave. She couldn't let them win; she would get that mediocre amusement park corn dog if it was the last thing she did.

“Hey, what's up?”

Anne cringed on the inside. *Seriously? Now? When I'm all sweaty and gross and standing in line for food covered in grease?*

She turned around and smiled at Freddy, who didn't seem to mind the heat one bit. She couldn't even find any signs of sweat on his face. *Lucky bastard.*

“Hey, just waiting in line for some food. I thought you were off with Hattie and Lisa?”

“Yeah, but they wanted to go on one of those log rides, and I wasn't exactly keen on walking around soaked all day. What're you getting?”

Anne pretended to look at the menu, as though she hadn't been standing in this line for over a half hour like a chump just for some mystery meat wrapped in wet bread.

“Oh, I dunno, I'm still deciding. You want anything?” She didn't have to worry about someone accusing him of cutting in line, since, to add insult to injury, the universe had decided to keep her as the last person in line throughout almost the whole ordeal. There had been someone behind her for about five minutes, but they had had the good sense to wander off when the line didn't move more than an inch.

“Oh, I think I could spring for a burger. It’ll probably taste like a fried sneaker, but I guess you don’t come to these little shacks for quality, do ya?”

No, obviously not; what kind of a statement is that?

“Heh, Yeah, I guess not. Can you imagine if I tried to ask them for a plate of foie gras?”

“They’d probably think you had just asked for plane tickets,” he said with a closed-lipped grin that didn’t quite meet his eyes.

Anne’s face scrunched up in confusion. *What the hell does that mean? Is he trying to be funny? Jesus, I can’t believe I was actually going to marry this guy...*

“Huh?”

“Oh, I meant because they’d think it was the name of a country. Sorry, never mind.”

Anne was prepared to feel bad for him (*oh, shit, he’s just trying to be nice and I’m acting like a dick, why can’t I ever just say the right thing?*), but his facial expression didn’t change. Had she not been as snide as she had thought? Was she overthinking everything in this conversation because she didn’t want him to think she cared? Did she care? Was this damn line ever going to give her the corn dog she deserved?

Then, like a gift from the gods, she heard the cry of “Next!” and she realized that the only thing standing between her and the counter was a foot of empty space.

“Better get up there, before the rush sets in,” Freddy said, and this time she gave him a chuckle to acknowledge the joke. The order was taken and completed with surprising speed, and, after she had her corn dog treated with mustard and he had his burger that did indeed look like a fried sneaker, they looked for a table at which to sit. Neither of them had explicitly discussed eating together, but the natural social inclination to sit with one’s peers when receiving food had kicked in so that, before she knew it, Anne had backed herself into the inescapable situation of eating lunch with her ex-fiancé with whom she had only had about five conversations with since he had moved

in. As they settled into their seats, Anne took a rather large bite out of the end of her corn dog, making an offering to the ravenous demon that had taken up residence in the pit of her stomach.

“How is it?” Freddy asked before she had even had a chance to swallow yet. To spite him, she began chewing in slow motion, and he got the sarcastic smile on his face that she remembered so well from her high school days, which made her, for just a moment, forget exactly how swallowing works. Before she had the chance to figure out why she was having trouble sending the food down the chute, however, it finally did what it was supposed to do, and she shrugged.

“Eh, it’s okay. How’s the burger?”

He took a bite, chewing it as thoroughly as she had chewed her own food and nodding with apparent satisfaction before saying, his mouth still full, “Yup, tastes like ass,” and swallowing with *faux* gusto. Then he took another huge bite, and Anne let a genuine laugh slip out at that as she began devouring her own meagre serving.

“So,” he said, “what’ll you be doing after this?”

“Oh, I dunno,” she said after swallowing, half of her corn dog now gone. “I was thinking about doing that haunted house ride over there, she said, using her corn dog as a pointer. Freddy looked behind him to see what she was talking about.

The House of Horrors wasn’t exactly a grand affair; it was a two-story building made to look like an old, haunted manor house while still using the cheapest of possible materials. It was the kind of hole-in-the-wall haunt where people in bad rubber masks covered in fake blood jumped out from behind curtains, lightbulbs draped with shredded sheets appeared in windows accompanied by a burst of loud, pressurized air, and cheesy horror movie laughs and stock monster noises played over grainy speakers. It was barely enough to terrify the average four-year-old, but Anne still had a soft spot in her heart for it; she had always been into the silliest, cheesiest, most non-scary horror movies.

He rolled his eyes and smiled, and they embarked upon their journey. That journey, however, was to last only moments, as, when they stepped forward, a fake ghost popped up into a makeshift window among a chorus of impossibly loud bursts of pressurized air. Anne dutifully jumped, even though she had known that the ghost would be there, but Freddy scared her far more by immediately dropping to the ground. His eyes were wide, darting everywhere, and she could see that his whole body was shaking. His formerly sweat-free skin was now covered in a thin sheen, and she could see his shirt clinging to his back.

“Freddy, what the hell? Are you okay?”

He didn’t seem to hear her; he started belly crawling forward, not speaking, trying to keep his eyes on everything at once. Anne knelt down and moved to grab his shoulders.

“Hey, Freddy, snap out of it! This isn’t funny!”

When her hands touched him, he whirled around and scrambled backwards, letting out a terrified scream. His eyes were looking at her, but they weren’t seeing her; they were seeing something far away, something horrific, something that she knew that she could never see nor understand.

“Freddy, Freddy, it’s me! I’m here! It’s okay!”

She put her hands on his cheeks and he immediately tried to shake her off, but she held firm. In his panicked state, he wasn’t able to fight her off as easily as he should have been, and soon, as she kept his eyes trained on hers, his expression began to clear. Slowly, bit by bit, awareness of where and when he was trickled back into his face, and the horror at the unknowable terror that he had seen morphed into a mixture of fear and what appeared to be shame.

“Wha...What happened?”

Anne released him, satisfied that he was fully back in himself now.

“I don’t know, that ghost popped up in the window and you just went nuts... You jumped down on the ground, you looked terrified of something...”

Freddy groaned and put his hands on his face, and, within moments, she could hear muffled sobs making their way through his closed fingers. She looked back at the entrance, where another family was already lining up to take their turn, and wrapped her arm around him.

“Hey, let’s get out of here, okay? I don’t really feel like going through here, anyway. Not my taste.”

Freddy didn’t respond at first, but when she nudged his shoulders, he wiped his eyes and nodded, rising to his feet on shaking knees. Together they stumbled out of the House of Horrors, ignoring the confused looks of the ticket taker and the family of three who were taking their place, and she led him to the shade of a nearby tree, away from the main routes and crowds. A bank of clouds had rolled in, covering the sun and sending a cool, refreshing breeze through the park. As the leaves rustled above them, seeming to whisper all the questions that Anne was too afraid to ask, she went with the one that the easiest.

“Freddy, are... are you okay?”

He was silent for a moment, staring into the space in front of his shoes, his arms wrapped around his knees. When Anne began to think that he was not going to answer, however, his voice finally found a modicum of life.

“I... I don’t know, I just... This has been happening ever since I got back. I’ll be completely fine, and then I’ll hear a loud noise like that, or a car will get too close to me speeding by, or I’ll be in a car driving through fields of tall corn or grass, and all of a sudden... I’m just, I’m back, I’m back there, and I don’t know how it happens, or why, but just all of a sudden I’m back in that nightmare, and I don’t know how to get back, and I...and, and, and I... Oh, god, Anne, it’s horrible...”

The tears began to flow again as Freddy took shaky breath after shaky breath, and Anne sat down without thinking and wrapped her arms around him. He resisted for only a second before collapsing into her, allowing the terror and horror to flow out of him one sob at a time in the lap of his ex-fiancé, as mothers and fathers and children strolled by without giving him a second look.

This incident helps to break the ice between herself and Freddy and, as the novel progresses, they become closer, opening up to each other and finally talking like old friends. Anne helps him to adjust to life in her house and helps him work through his PTSD when it flares up, though being around both him and Hattie gets harder and harder, as Hattie is actively pursuing Freddy as a romantic interest and Anne believes that he returns those feelings. Anne also confronts Liz about her laziness and lack of a career path, and, after a big fight, Liz reveals her extreme terror of the future and the paralyzing fear that she feels whenever she has tried to strike out on her own. Liz soon leaves to stay with Mary and Charlie, finding an initial purpose in helping them get steadier on their own feet and taking pressure off of Mary.

Anne also finds herself in the opening stages of a relationship with a man named James Banks during this time, but it quickly fizzles out when they both realize that she still loves Freddy. Meanwhile, Hattie and Lisa's friend, Chuck, who often tags along with the group and who is interested in Hattie and Lisa almost to the point of obsession, becomes increasingly jealous, especially because he hates Freddy as a Vietnam veteran. This sets the stage for the events of the following chapter, which occurs while the group is attending a local arts fair downtown about a month-and-a-half after the previous chapter.

Monster

The cold air that whooshed out of the open door felt like a wind whipping through the trees on the slopes of a mountain, and the whole group sighed in relief. As they all filed into Uncle Andy's Ice Cream Parlor, Anne, who had entered first, looked back to check that everyone was inside. Lisa waltzed in right behind her, the giant gold hoops hanging from her ears flashing as bright as police cruiser spotlights in the sun. Freddy came next, but Hattie was doing her best to still walk side-by-side with him and took a hard hit to her shoulder from the door frame as a result. Anne laughed inside, almost smiled, but caught herself before that could happen and started scolding herself.

What is wrong with me?

Then came Chuck, slinking in with a cheeriness comparable to Wednesday Addams, his eyes glued to the back of Hattie's head. Anne even had to step over and hold the door to keep it from slamming into his face; he had no attention for anything else in the room. Anne's skin crawled looking at him; why would Hattie and Lisa hang out with this guy?

Anne shook her head to clear it and pull her focus away from Chuck as the door slammed shut. She breathed deep of the frigid, dry air, and her lungs cried out in relief after having sucked in hot, water-logged, Midwestern summer for the past two hours. As she approached the counter with the rest and Uncle Andy himself (who had adopted the title purely for business reasons—he had no siblings) emerged in the red and white striped shirt that he seemed to have been wearing since she was a toddler, she looked back at Freddy and couldn't help but light up at the broad smile that had emerged on his face. He was happy, and it looked full and genuine for the first time in days, since the amusement park. It wasn't the forced smile of someone pretending to be okay and in the moment, a fake, plastered thing that doesn't reach the eyes; this smile radiated out from him like bass from a subwoofer, so powerful that she could swear that she was shaking on the inside, and she knew that his mind had finally caught up with his expression. It didn't matter how she felt about him

and Hattie, or that Hattie was the one making him smile like that; it was enough to know that he felt it.

“All right, boys and girls, what’re we having?” Uncle Andy asked, clapping his hands together. You could be in your seventies and he would still call you boy or girl.

“Oh, let’s see...” Freddy said, his hand migrating up to his chin. “Oh, you guys go before me, I haven’t had enough time yet.”

“Two scoops of cherry,” piped Lisa, who was already sitting at a table, her legs sprawled across two other chairs. There were only a couple of other people in the parlor (most were probably still perusing booths downtown and didn’t feel like walking or driving this far out of their way), but she apparently still felt it necessary to save as many seats as possible.

“All right, two cherry, coming up,” Uncle Andy said, reaching for the stack of nearby cones with a flourish like a magician. “And for you, sir?”

“Just give me some vanilla,” Chuck said, stalking over to the table where Lisa sat. He started to move around to her side, but she didn’t move her legs an inch, so he took a chair on the opposite corner of the table, his face gaining another cloud in its growing stormfront.

“Groovy,” Uncle Andy said, ignoring Chuck’s dour mood in favor of keeping up his “Hey there, kiddos!” attitude. As he handed Lisa’s ice cream off to her sister, he continued, “And for you?”

Hattie looked at the menu for a moment, but then switched her gaze to Freddy and served up a coy smile, saying, “Oh, I’ll take whatever he likes.”

Anne rolled her eyes so hard that she was surprised when her optic nerve didn’t snap.

Freddy, however, couldn’t have found the hint with two hands and a flashlight, and just looked surprised that the pressure had already returned to him to make a decision. “Oh, um, well, I guess that I’ll just have a couple scoops of chocolate with some sprinkles. Classic, right?”

“Sounds great to me!” Hattie said a little too loudly, still staring directly at Freddy. *Geez, woman, you’re an engineering student at Purdue, why are you acting like a high-school sophomore around a quarterback?*

“Anne? You in there?”

“Huh?” she said, suddenly realizing that Uncle Andy, Freddy, and Hattie were all looking at her. “Sorry, spaced out. What?”

“What’ll you be having today?” Uncle Andy asked again as he handed Chuck’s vanilla to Hattie and went to work on Hattie and Freddy’s treats.

“Oh, um, I dunno...”

“I’m assuming you’re craving chocolate and vanilla?” Freddy said with a knowing smile.

Anne felt her cheeks go red hot again despite the cold air. “Wait, what? What do you mean?”

Freddy adopted the look and tone of someone talking to a confused grandmother who had forgotten what she had just said minutes before: “Chocolate and vanilla. For your order. That’s what you always get, isn’t it? Unless I’m remembering wrong.”

“Ohhhhh,” she said, chuckling to mask her raging embarrassment and frustration and alleviate the others’ confusion. “Sorry, I guess the heat has just been getting to me. Yeah, I’d love that. It’s still my favorite.”

“It’s a classic,” Freddy said, smiling at her once more, and then turned to pay Uncle Andy for the ice cream as Hattie grabbed his and her cones and went to take a seat next to Lisa. Anne walked up to Freddy as he counted out the change, taking a moment to snatch a closer look at the way that his Hawaiian shirt contoured to his chest and stomach, the smooth skin of his forearms, his well-kept nails, and felt a small shiver that had nothing to do with the temperature. She wished she could keep looking, but then Freddy was putting the money on the counter, and she turned her head to find that Uncle Andy was handing her a cone with two thick balls of ice cream standing solid and

immoveable on a waffle cone, looking as though they had never seen the strain of a summer day. She took the cone and sat down across from Lisa, leaving a chair between herself and Chuck, who was staring down at his cone more than he was actually eating it.

When Freddy finally arrived and sat down across from Chuck, Hattie wasted little time in trying to scoot her chair closer to him without making it too obvious. Anne gave off a quiet snort, more amused than angry now, and when she looked over and caught the eyes of the grinning Lisa she knew they were thinking about the same thing. She darted her eyes over to them for a second and then rolled them, and Lisa tried and failed to stifle a laugh, which came out a chortle that was much louder than the laugh that she was trying to avoid would have been. Both Hattie and Freddy looked over at her.

“What?” they said in unison, him smiling and genuinely asking, her shooting a look that was as hard as steel beneath the affable exterior.

“Nothing,” Anne and Lisa said at once, sending them into a fit of laughter that infected the whole table. The whole table, that is, except for Chuck, who was still glaring at his ice cream. He had taken one large bite out of it, but other than that had done nothing to it, and, despite the fact that the inside of Uncle Andy’s felt like a refrigerator, she could already see miniature pools of melted dairy building up at the edges of the cone, ready to spill over at the slightest jolt or provocation.

“Come on, Chuck, what’s the matter? You try out that guitar girl’s number in a phone booth and get a Mexican restaurant again?” Lisa said, turning to Anne afterward and theatrically whispering, “It happens more than you’d think.”

Anne smiled, and Chuck let out a harsh chuckle, but it was a laugh devoid of mirth, more bitter and joyless than gas station coffee at eleven in the morning. She looked down to see that the shake that the laugh had given the ice cream cone had caused some to spill over, and thick, speckled drops of french vanilla were plopping onto the baby blue polyester of his leisure suit.

“Funny,” he said, seeming not to notice the sugary treat staining his pants, even though he was looking directly at it. “That’s really funny, Lisa. But no, that’s not what’s wrong. No, what’s wrong is that we’re all sitting here, chilling, eating ice cream, out on the town, acting like nothing’s wrong, while your sister is flagrantly trying to bang a murderer.”

The silence was immediate, penetrating, painful. Chuck was staring at Freddy, and everyone was staring back at him. Anne’s eyes were wide, her mouth open; Lisa was frozen with her former grin, even though her eyes registered shock, as though she didn’t know what to do with her face all of a sudden; Hattie had stopped with her ice cream halfway to her mouth, the cone and scoops hanging inches from her lips; and Freddy was looking straight back into Chuck’s eyes, not moving. His smile was completely gone; Anne couldn’t find a trace of it anywhere. She wasn’t worried about what she saw, though; what scared her was the fact that she couldn’t see anything. Freddy’s face had gone blank, and she couldn’t read anything that was going on behind his eyes. Sure, he was here, he was in the moment, he was completely aware of his surroundings; it wasn’t like what had happened in the haunted house ride. But everything that was happening inside him was just that, inside of him, hidden so well that even Anne couldn’t see it.

Then Freddy laughed, an almost exact copy of the laugh that Chuck had let out moments ago, and it was when she heard that laugh that Anne really began to worry.

“All right, Chuck, funny joke. Now come off it, eat your ice cream.”

Chuck’s nostrils flared, his cheeks burning red beneath his enormous sideburns. “You think I’m joking?”

“No,” Freddy said, “but I also don’t think that you mean what you’re saying. It’s been a long day. It’s hot out. We’re all getting tired. Just apologize to Hattie and let’s move on.”

“And apologize to Freddy, too,” Lisa said, her face uncharacteristically serious.

“Fine. I’m sorry, Hattie. But I’m not apologizing to him,” he said, looking at Lisa and nodding in Freddy’s direction.

“You called him a murderer.”

“He is a murderer.”

“Why the hell would you say something like that?”

“He was in Vietnam. They’re all murderers, every last one of them.”

“Guys, come on, chill out,” Anne said, ignoring the fact that the ice cream cone in her hand compromised any authority she might have. “We haven’t said anything we can’t take back, let’s just apologize and head out before we say anything we regret.”

“Oh, stay out of this, Anne; you’re not our mom,” Chuck said, staring Lisa down now.

“Hey, she didn’t do anything to you! Lay off!” Lisa said, her voice rising.

“I can say what I want to who I want. Free country.”

“Get bent, asshole!”

“Go fuck yourself, dyke!”

Lisa threw her ice cream to the ground and leapt out of her chair and across the table, sending Chuck toppling over with an enormous clatter from his chair. Anne, Hattie, and Freddy were already up and moving to pull them apart, but, before Hattie and Freddy had pulled Lisa off of Chuck and Anne had dragged Chuck out of the way, she had already left three bleeding scratch marks in his cheek and hit his left eye hard enough that it was already starting to swell.

He had barely regained his feet before he was already back on his diatribe. “You crazy bitch, you need to learn to control your temper.”

“Hey, shut up, asshole,” Freddy said, anger now bubbling to the surface.

Why had it taken so long to show up?

“Don’t tell me what to do, you pig! You think you’re one of us, but you’re not. You’re just a sadistic asshole using some bad dreams as an excuse to get sympathy.”

Freddy’s arms were shaking now, his fingers clenched into fists. “Watch it, Chuck. Quit talking out of your ass, now. You don’t know what it was like over there. You can never know what it was like over there. Quit acting like you know more than shit about something you weren’t even old enough to understand.”

“I understand that you were killing children over there, Freddy. I understand that you and your buddies watched as little girls screamed as their skin boiled under napalm. I understand that you posed with the corpses of children a quarter my age. Do I need to understand anything else?”

“I never did anything like that, you piece of shit! I didn’t want to be there in the first place!”

“You, someone else, it doesn’t matter. You soldier types are all the same, imperialist pigs who wouldn’t think twice about burning a kid alive in the name of your god, the United States of America. I don’t care if you never saw it or did it. I bet you wished you did. I bet you would have liked to hear them scream.”

Then the world was a blur. Everyone was moving at once, but, when she remembered the scene later, Anne would swear that she could see everything in slow motion. She could see Freddy’s hands shooting out and grabbing Chuck by the neck, could see Hattie and Lisa trying to hold him back as he shook them off like nagging flies, could see the sudden fear and pain in Chuck’s eyes as his air supply was cut off and a dark stain began to spread on his slacks as Freddy lifted him three or four inches off the ground. Above it all, a cacophony of frantic voices: Uncle Andy shouting for them to stop fighting and get out, Hattie and Lisa yelling at Freddy to put Chuck down, and, above it all, Freddy’s anguished, furious, primal scream, a scream that tore from the depths of his soul and filled Anne’s ears with every image, every dream, every flashback, every moment of pain and fear and guilt and anger that Freddy had been suffering for the last seven years. When she would

remember that day, the first and last thing she would remember would always be that scream, and then the tears that were streaming down Freddy's face as he whirled Chuck around and threw him against the table they had been sitting at moments before.

The table legs snapped instantly, the cheap wood and glue not made to withstand anything more forceful than an eight-year-old running into them on a sugar high. Chuck's head hit the table with a sickening thud, and Anne saw his eyes roll up into his head as he crumpled on the floor, looking as limp and weightless as a dummy stuffed with feathers. A slow trickle of blood began to flow from his left ear, dripping onto the splinter-covered tile with a sickening plinking sound, like water dripping from a faucet.

For a few moments, nobody moved. Everyone was too shocked by what had happened to remember how to use their legs and voices, most of all Freddy, who was staring at Chuck's body with a mixture of horror and sadness and guilt, his hands raised in the air as though he were Macbeth staring at a phantom dagger. Then, after what felt like an hour, the voice of Uncle Andy shattered all of their reveries. No sign of his former joviality remained; he sounded as though he had aged forty years in the span of ten minutes.

"I'm going to call an ambulance for Mr. Haynes here. And, after that, I'm going to call the police. Someone check on him to make sure he's not dead."

Uncle Andy walked into the back rooms, his stride somber and drained. At first, everyone continued to stand and stare at Chuck's body, not daring to move for fear that, when they knelt down to check, he really may not be breathing. Then Freddy broke the spell they were trapped under and approached, still holding his hands in front of him as though they were toxic. He knelt down and leaned close, his ear over Chuck's mouth, and Anne could see from the trembling of his mouth, his labored breathing, and his trembling arms that he was only seconds away from crying.

“He’s alive,” Freddy said, collapsing onto the floor as he said it and covering his face with his hands. “He’s alive.”

Anne started to move toward him, but Hattie was already on it, making it to him in two strides and slipping down next to him, putting an arm around his shoulders. He fell into her then, unable to hold the tears back anymore, and Anne stood there, unsure of what to do, as Freddy wept bitter tears into Hattie’s ABBA t-shirt, Lisa stumbled into the nearest chair, and Chuck Haynes lay unconscious and bleeding in the splintered ruins of their high spirits.

After this incident, Anne and Freddy quickly become distant again. She tries to talk to him about it, but he avoids a discussion at all costs, staying away from her even more than he did when he first moved in. Hattie, Lisa, and Anne all cut Chuck out of their lives, and Hattie and Lisa come to check on Freddy, but he avoids them, too. Anne talks with Grandma Russell to try and figure out what to do, but, in the process of this, finally discovers her grandmother’s prejudices and realizes that this has been fueling the way that Grandma Russell counselled her on Freddy from the very beginning. Anne then looks to Ellie Crane for help, as she sees her as the only person left to turn to who could understand where she was coming from. Ellie describes how hard it was for Benny in Vietnam and her own struggles keeping up hope that he would return, and, at the end, tells her of how Benny said that Ellie was the only thing that kept him going through that war. She tells Anne that, while she doesn’t deign to know all the history between Anne and Freddy, she bets that Freddy felt the same way and likely has never stopped loving her. This leads into the following chapter, which is third-to-last in the novel.

Confession

As Anne turned onto her street, the rubber soles of her sneakers clapping softly against the hot cement of the sidewalk, a thick, humid early September gust arose from nowhere, flying through the street and sending her hair flying behind her like a wind sock. A mound of grass clippings sat nearby in the gutter, and the wind scattered them everywhere, carrying some of them all the way to the roof of a nearby house. Anne wished she could be among them, whipped away by some unseen force to places she had never thought or dreamed of, not a care or worry in the world aside from trying to swallow sunlight to make sugar. A violent shiver rocked her body despite the heat. She could see her house at the other end of the block, calling to her through the late summer haze with promises of fans, cold tea, and shelter from the sun. She imagined Freddy was already sprawled out on the couch in shorts and a Zeppelin t-shirt, staring out the living room's picture window at the falling afternoon light. The TV would be droning on behind him, probably showing the tail end of a Cubs game, as he enjoyed the view and took a swig from a bottle of Sam Adams.

And as he waits for you to come home, smiling as soon as he sees you walking past, rushing to you as you walk through the door, sweeping you up into a kiss...

The vision gave her chills yet again, and she shook herself to push the idea back into her subconscious, but she couldn't stop her cheeks from glowing red and the corners of her mouth from pulling upward into a smile.

"When you're what keeps someone sane for two years, those feelings don't just go away. Sure, they may bury them, try to ignore them, try to drown the flames inside them with a barrel of whiskey, but they'll never be able to get that fire to go out. There will always be a glowing cinder in their heart ready to flare into life again with the slightest breath."

Ellie's words careened around Anne's brain, seeming to activate another fond memory of Freddy wherever they landed. The distant past and the events of the past four months were all

running together in her mind; Anne could remember the time that he had trudged through a mile of three-foot-deep snow and below-zero wind chills just to make sure that she and her family were safe after a blizzard had knocked out the phone lines in 1966 just as easily as the joy she had felt holding his hand for dear life on the roller coaster at the amusement park. The love that had consumed her at the end of the previous decade was mixing with the newfound hope that Ellen had placed in her heart to create a heady brew of giddiness and longing optimism.

Could he really still feel the same way after all these years? After what I did to him? I know that Ellen said that I had nothing to blame myself for, but I shouldn't have let Dad or Grandma cajole me like they did. It may not be my fault, but would Freddy even see it that way? I dumped him as he was crawling through bug-infested, sweltering jungles and spending every waking moment of his life afraid that someone would pop out from behind a tree and pump twenty bullets into him. If I left him alone when he was in the thick of that, could he ever forgive me? Especially with what he's had to go through alone ever since he came back?

Doubt and anxiety were creeping in, insidious tendrils of toxic yellow-green snaking their way through her mind, attempting to poison the bright red swirls of love and hope that had been filling her brain to bursting. She shook her head to try to clear it, hit a hard reset and drain the heady clouds that were trying to obscure her thinking. The late summer winds did nothing to help, making her feel slow and muddled, and the emotional concoction was strong enough to make her wish she could just lie down and sleep it away right there on the sidewalk before going back in that house.

Only three houses away now. What would she say when she walked in the door? Would she do a general call of "Hey!" to the whole house, or just look around until she found him? What if he wasn't home and there was just Liz or Dad to ask her what she was searching around for? What if he didn't want to speak to her at all, and her coming in the door and loudly proclaiming herself would do nothing but drive him up the wall?

Jesus Christ, get a hold of yourself, she thought as she passed by the last house before hers. *Just walk in the door like a normal human being. Is that so hard? Is that too much to ask?*

As she turned onto the walk that led up to 2476 Wheelhaven Avenue, she stopped in her tracks, gazing at the faded blue door that she had passed through so many times without a second thought. A dead wreath on the door, a relic from the previous autumn, resplendent in its mix of leaves and pine cones, swung back and forth on its nail as the wind blew, making it seem almost as though the house was waving to her in greeting. The porch swing squeaked on its hinges, its empty seat and peeling paint striking Anne with an unexplainable sense of foreboding.

Just walk up the sidewalk. It's your house. Why are you scared to walk into your own house?

Because if I walk in, then there's always a chance that he might walk right out.

There it was: she hadn't allowed herself to think that she cared about that, but now there was no way for her to hide it away in the depths of her mind any longer. If she walked in there, there was a very good chance that she could spill everything to Freddy, only for him to trample her heart as he walked out the door. Or, in the more anticlimactic and more likely version of that scenario, he would simply end his stay with them and walk back out of her life forever, with no resolution for either of them. A lifetime of uncertainty to face. Could she take those years of uncertainty, or the possible dagger to the heart? Could she ever be ready to walk back into that house when it lay empty?

I don't know. I don't know if I can. But I know I'll never forgive myself if I don't at least try.

Anne placed her hands together in a gesture like she was praying and brought them up to her face as she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. All her hopes and worries swam through her body, coursed through her blood. She refused to let them send her into a panic, and with every slow breath in and out she visualized her heart slowing and her shaking hands going still. Her body and the emotional half of her mind resisted, fighting to make her lose control, but she refused to yield,

and soon the rest of her had no choice but to comply. As she took a final preparatory breath, letting it out in a deep sigh and feeling her soul settle into a jittery subjugation, she willed her feet to carry her forward across the sidewalk, up the creaking stairs, and to the door. She pulled her keys out with her hand, now steady as a surgeon's, and stuck the key into the lock. The sound of the tumblers turning inside the lock reminded Anne of the stereotypical sound of a cage door being slid open. She pulled the door open and slid inward in one fluid motion, pulling the door shut behind her and turning to face whatever future was waiting for her.

What she saw instead was Freddy, leaning against her father's recliner with a pile of fully packed bags. He was already looking at her when her eyes lit upon him, and a smile that seemed at once happy and bitterly sad appeared upon his face.

"Hey, Annie."

The tableau which greeted her was so unlike anything she had deliberated upon in her flurry of imagination just minutes before that she had no idea of how to react. Her eyes were taking in all of the individual elements of the scene, like the bags, or Freddy twirling a key on the end of his index finger, or the fact that the TV was in fact off and an open drink was nowhere in sight, but her mind was having trouble putting all of the details together into a cohesive narrative to which she could react. Instead, her brain went on autopilot and said the first collection of syllables that popped into it:

"What it is, Fred?"

What was that? When have I ever said that before?

She could see in his eyes that he was confused by her sudden and awkward attempt at using slang she never used, but he was gracious enough to move past it.

"Um, I've got a favor to ask you."

“Yeah? What is it?” All of the calm and collected demeanor that she had summoned outside the house was draining away by the second, and she felt as though her heart sounded like the bell of an alarm clock. *How can he not hear that? Am I seriously the only one that hears that?*

Freddy reached up with the hand that wasn’t holding a key and rubbed the back of his head, his palm whispering across his thick, curly hair. Anne imagined her own fingers running through it, twirling within its tight ringlets, grasping his head tight as she pulled him in...

“Um, well, I know this is kind of sudden, but I’m actually moving out.”

The door was firmly closed behind her, but Anne still felt a bitter, dark wind pass through her when she heard those words. She could no longer feel her heart beating in her chest; wherever it was, it was too far away to even come close to fighting the pervasive chill that was invading her body. Slowly, surely, all of the organs within her torso were disappearing into a black hole.

“Oh. Why?”

Her voice came out flat, emotionless, and Freddy almost seemed to deflate a bit when the words came out of her mouth. *Stop, that’s just wishful thinking.* His eyes stayed locked on the ground, refusing to meet hers, and he seemed like he was choosing every one of his next words carefully.

“It...well... See, the thing is... I don’t think that I can stay here anymore. Don’t get me wrong, I’ve genuinely enjoyed the past few months here...like, really enjoyed some parts...but I think it’s time that I moved on. I thought that I would be able to adjust to being back here, that I’d be able to drop back into a routine and that life would keep going almost like it did before I left, and even though I was really worried at first about living with your family, over time I thought that it wouldn’t be such a big deal after all... But then that thing with Chuck happened and, well, it started to make me take a second look at everything. At everyone. And I began to notice things. Little things, mostly, but things that couldn’t escape my attention. People glancing out of the sides of their eyes at me as I walk down the street. They may not be doing it consciously, but I can see them

swerve to the side of the sidewalk even if we have no chance of running into each other. In the café downtown, people will sit at a table with strangers if seating is limited, and they'll start talking up a storm in minutes if one of them isn't flipping through the paper or reading a book. But when I sit down? You'd think I had smallpox; nobody ever sits at the table that I'm at, and anyone I've tried to spark a conversation with only talks in stops and starts, never contributing enough to make it more than one-sided. They barely give me the time of day.

“At first, if I noticed things like that, I thought it was just because I'd been gone for a long time. That's how towns like this can be, right? When you've lived there forever, you're one of the fold, but once you've left, it can be hard to reforge the bonds that might've broken over the years. I thought, 'Well, that's kind of disappointing, but I bet that'll change after a while, once they get used to me being around again.' But it didn't. No matter how long I stayed here, no matter what I did around town, no matter who I was out with, everyone still kept me at a distance. It's not like some people hadn't done that before, but now it's everyone. Who can blame them? I can't even go into a carnival ride without, panicking, and then what I did to Chuck...”

Freddy's voice had been growing thicker and had begun to tremble more and more, and when those final words escaped his lips, he couldn't hold it in any longer. He collapsed into Walter's chair and sobbed, huge, wracking wails that ripped themselves out of his throat with the force of a jet engine. Anne rushed over to him, her dread completely forgotten, and wrapped him in a tight embrace, still giving him some room to move as he continued to weep. It sounded like he was trying to say more, but his mouth couldn't find the words to express what he felt with more precision the wails that were already filling it. He tried to shrug her off as a first reaction, which gave Anne another brief pain deep inside of herself, but after a moment he yielded, wrapping his arms around her and crying unhindered into her shoulder. She could already feel his tears soaking through the fabric of her shirt. She stroked his head, running her hand down his scalp and neck, trying her best

to be reassuring when she had absolutely no idea what to say. All of the banal reassurances that people keep in their minds were flying through her head, but none of them seemed to be able to do the slightest bit of good whenever she imagined saying them.

Anne didn't keep track of the time as they sat there, but she was aware of the shadows growing long, the bushy silhouettes of the trees unfurled across the living room. It was a beautiful summer evening, but it fell victim to that haunting emptiness that such nights could sometimes have, as though the coming cold and decay of winter lay just beyond the horizon, waiting to send the world into a deathly, miserable slumber and make everyone rue the day that they wished the heat would disappear. There were no cars driving down the street, no late-night walkers or joggers in short shorts and tank tops. Even the squirrels and songbirds were in hiding tonight, refusing to deliver the tell-tale rustle of leaves or chorus of chirps that would normally accompany the arrival of twilight. Walter and Liz were still gone on their trip, and Grandma Russell was nowhere in sight. Anne and Freddy were completely and utterly alone.

Anne could feel the isolation creeping through her skin, filling the silence and surrounding them like a cloud, but, before this ominous melancholy could take hold, she felt Freddy's crying begin to slow. His breaths became longer and deeper. The flow from his eyes slowed until, quaking from the effort of weeping so hard for so long, he pulled away from Anne's shoulder and looked her in the eyes for the first time since she had arrived home. His corneas were bloodshot and soaked, his eyelids swollen. The skin of his face was covered in a sheen of saltwater and mucus; his close-cut beard glistened from it. As they gazed into each other's eyes, Anne could feel the heat radiating from him (*my personal furnace, I used to call him my personal furnace*), and she longed to lean forward and close the few inches that lay between their faces, but the gulf between them that had been there when he arrived was still there. It reached far wider than that small gap between their mouths, and Anne didn't know if she could do anything to cross it. All she could think to do was give him a sad smile,

and when he returned it, she knew that, no matter what happened next, the tenderness and understanding that they were able to share in that look would be enough for her to know that he still carried something in his heart for her.

“I’ll never see you that way,” Anne said, her voice thick, and she realized that she was on the verge of tears herself. “I never have. No matter what they’re like out there, I’ll always see you as Freddy Henderson, the man that I love.”

And then Freddy was kissing her, and the haunted, lonely night faded away into the bliss of a kiss filled with love, regret, and the tears that come from both.

After this, even though they now know they love each other, Freddy remains firm in his determination to leave. Anne tries to convince him to stay to no avail and tells him that she can’t go with him when he asks, because she must take care of her father. She offers to drive him to the train station, which he accepts. They ride over in silence, and, when they arrive, make another confession of love and kiss. Freddy asks if Anne thinks that they’ll ever meet again, to which she says that she hopes so, but does not know. Anne stays at the platform as Freddy boards his train and watches it as it rides off into the distance. She thinks on whether she made the right choice and, although doubtful, decides that she did before driving back home.

Fourteen years later, Anne, her husband, and their six-year-old daughter are shopping in the new Wal-Mart and admiring the store. As they pass through the aisles, Anne looks down the one they are in to see Freddy with a wife and son of his own, shopping for clothes. He looks up and catches her eye, and they share a smile, though Anne finds herself wondering if it was happy or mournful. Then, her daughter pulls her attention away to beg for a toy, and, when she looks up, Freddy and his family have moved on.

Appendix I: Cast of Characters

Characters Shown in this Thesis

Anne Johnson: The novel's protagonist. She is 27 years old, works as a hostess at a local restaurant and lives with her father, Walter (who she is the main caretaker for), and next-youngest sister, Liz. She was engaged to Freddy Henderson after they graduated from high school but broke off the engagement while he was fighting in Vietnam (partially at the urging of her father and grandmother). It is not until he arrives back in town that she realizes that she still loves him. She is analogous to Anne Elliott in *Persuasion*.

Freddy Henderson: A 26-year-old African American Air Force pilot and Vietnam veteran who has returned to Bismarck for a short time. He and his best friend, Benny, are both staying in Anne's house as tenants, although Freddy was not aware that it would be the house of his ex-fiancée when he agreed to live there. It is not until he has lived with them for weeks that he is able to come to terms with the fact that he still loves her. He is also suffering from PTSD, which has gone undiagnosed and makes it difficult for him to carry on through daily life as though everything were normal. He is analogous to Captain Frederick Wentworth in *Persuasion*.

Walter Johnson: A 56-year-old disabled factory worker. He is Anne and Liz's father and needs Anne as a caretaker, as he lost a leg in World War II. He is very cantankerous and often ungrateful, openly favoring Liz even though Liz sponges off his and Anne's incomes, but he does show gratitude to her when pushed. The loss of his factory job due to the beginnings of deindustrialization creates the need for the Johnson family to take on lodgers. He is analogous to Sir Walter Elliott in *Persuasion*.

Liz Johnson: Anne's 23-year-old sister. She has graduated high school but takes advantage of her father's favor to live with him and Anne while working as little as possible. This is not purely from selfishness, however: she is also terrified of striking out on her own and copes with this fear of the future and adulthood by burying it beneath a shell of apathy and self-interest. She is prejudiced against Vietnam veterans, leading to even more tension in the house than would have already existed when Freddy arrives. She and Anne almost never get along, but they have some tender moments. She is analogous to Anne Elliott's older sister Elizabeth in *Persuasion*.

Grandma Russell: Anne's 74-year-old grandmother. She lives down the street from the Johnsons and serves as the only living connection to Anne's mother, since her mother died when she was young, and her father rarely speaks of her. Anne trusts Grandma Russell a great deal but comes to see that her advice may not be nearly as wise or foolproof as she had always thought. She is analogous to the family friend Lady Russell in *Persuasion*.

Benny Crane: An unendingly chipper, 35-year-old Vietnam veteran and Freddy's best friend. He is the first person to move into the Johnson home with his wife, Ellie, and is the one who convinces

Freddy to move in, too, not knowing his friend's history with the family. He and Freddy met during the war, and their relationship serves as a painful reminder for Anne of what she and Freddy may have had. He is analogous to Admiral Croft in *Persuasion*.

Ellie Crane: Benny Crane's 30-year-old wife and another friend of Freddy's. Ellie serves as a younger confidante for Anne, and, throughout the novel, Anne begins to trust her more and more as she begins to realize the fallibility of Grandma Russell. She and Anne bond over their mutual experiences of having men they were to marry in Vietnam, and it is on the advice of Ellie that Anne confesses to Freddy that she still loves him. She is analogous to Mrs. Croft in *Persuasion*.

Hattie Smith: She is a 23-year-old engineering student at Purdue University who has come home for the summer. She is Lisa Smith's older sister and is also the sister of Charlie Smith, who is married to Anne's youngest sister, Mary (neither of whom are involved in the chapters above). She is also a friend of Anne, who knew her when she was a freshman and Anne was a senior in high school. Anne and Hattie kept up their friendship after their siblings got married. Hattie had a major crush on Freddy when she was in high school, and she begins actively pursuing him when she realizes that he is back in town and single, to Anne's dismay. She is analogous to Henrietta Musgrove in *Persuasion*.

Lisa Smith: Lisa is Hattie's 20-year-old sister and is attending Indiana University as an education major. Lisa has recently realized that she is gay, but, fearing the reaction that the people in town might have, has only come out to Hattie and Anne. She is also a friend of Anne's, although they did not know each other until their siblings got married to each other. She is analogous to Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion*, although, unlike Louisa, she does not serve as a romantic threat to Anne and Freddy (for obvious reasons).

Chuck Haynes: A 21-year-old mechanic who went to school with Hattie and Lisa and is still friends with them. Chuck has a crush on both Hattie and Lisa and is often trying to get one or the other to go out with him. He is extremely prejudiced against Vietnam veterans, which, in combination with Hattie's interest in Freddy, causes him to despise Freddy. He is analogous to Charles Hayter in *Persuasion*.

Characters Not Present in the Chapters Shown

Mary Smith (née Johnson): A 19-year-old stay-at-home mom, Mary is the youngest of the Johnson sisters and the only not to live with their father. Mary married her high school boyfriend, Charlie, after she got pregnant and both of their families essentially forced them to tie the knot. Mary is struggling to take care of their now nine-month-old child, since she was still a child herself when they got pregnant and is now struggling with postpartum depression. She is analogous to Mary Musgrove (née Elliott) in *Persuasion*.

Charlie Smith: Charlie is Mary's 19-year-old husband and works at both the local movie theater and as a server at the restaurant at which Anne is a hostess. He was much more comfortable with the situation in which he and Mary found themselves than she was and, where Mary often wishes she could escape from her current situation, he has decided that he would have had it no other way. He tries to be a good husband and father, but, since he is as clueless as Mary and does not understand her depression, he often falls short. He is analogous to Charles Musgrove in *Persuasion*, although, unlike Charles Musgrove, he is much younger and less mature than his sisters.

James Banks: A 28-year-old Army captain, James is a friend of Benny's that comes to visit him while Benny is staying at the Johnson household. James and Anne spark up a brief romance, which contributes to Freddy realizing that he still loves Anne, but she soon breaks it off when she realizes that she has not stopped loving Freddy, and James takes his leave of Bismarck. He is somewhat analogous to Captain Benwick in *Persuasion*, although he does not have the emotional baggage that Benwick does.

Appendix II: Annotated Bibliography

Austen, Jane. "The Text of Persuasion." *Persuasion*, edited by Patricia Meyer Spacks, 2nd ed., W. W. Norton, New York, 2013.

This is Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion* accompanied by the numerous criticisms and relevant essays that Norton Critical Editions always include. This source was, of course, extremely vital to my project, as it is the novel that I am adapting my own from, and read it in full again in the opening weeks of the semester, marking specific imagery, passages, and events that I thought were integral to my own story.

Burns, Ken and Lynn Novick, creators. *The Vietnam War*. PBS, 2017.

This 10-part documentary series, which premiered only two and a half years ago, was my main source for general information about the Vietnam War. Ken Burns is well-known for his excellent documentaries, and, while some levied criticisms at this particular program for omitting certain elements of the war and its roots, I think that it was still a reliable source and gave me the basic information that I needed to contextualize the war when writing my chapters.

Cowell, Margaret. *Dealing with Deindustrialization: Adaptive Resilience in American Midwestern Regions*. Routledge, New York, 2014.

This book deals with the responses of various major metropolitan areas in the Midwest, including Indianapolis, to the increasing deindustrialization in the region during the late

1970s and early '80s. Its coverage of said deindustrialization during the late '70s was quite helpful to me in establishing the setup for the loss of Walter's job and, down the road, how the factory closure may affect the community. Some of the information about what came after this time period also helped to add context to how I wrote these scenes, knowing more than my characters did about the way things would turn out in this region of the country.

Erickson, Carolly. *Our Tempestuous Day: A History of Regency England*. William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1986.

This book is a history of England from 1810-1820, the period in which George III was no longer king of Great Britain and in which his son acted as the King Regent. This is the same time period in which *Persuasion* is set, and it should give me a lot of background about the different social and political upheavals that were occurring during this time in British history. This book informed my rereading of *Persuasion* and allowed me to look for both parallels and significant differences between Regency England and 1976 Indiana, guiding my decisions as to what the characters should do and what is going on around them in my novel.

Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1984.

This book comprises a manual to the craft of fiction writing put together by famed novelist and instructor John Gardner. Based upon the courses and seminars that he taught as a university professor, Gardner intertwines excerpts from famous literature with his lessons to teach his readers about everything from sentence structure to the aesthetics of writing. I used

this source in conjunction with Stephen King's *On Writing* as a guide to the art of fiction, and it was a very intriguing read that made me rethink the way that I conceived of my characters and their roles in the type of story I was trying to write.

Garrett, Charles. Personal interview. 16 April 2020.

This was an interview with my father, who was born in 1960 and grew up the son of factory workers in Valparaiso, Indiana. Since he was 13 when the energy crisis began and 16 at the time that my novel takes place, I thought that he would be able to offer some great insights into what it was like to live in that area at that time for a family that is in a very similar position to the characters in my novel (though my grandparents thankfully never lost their jobs at the factory in which they worked). He was indeed very helpful, offering a lot of good detail that I could use to supplement both the chapters included here and those that I will be writing in the future to complete the novel.

Garrett, Dana. Personal interview. 16 April 2020.

This was an interview with my mother, who was born in 1962 and grew up the daughter of a steel mill worker in Portage, Indiana. My reasons for interviewing her were much the same as for my father, since she was 11 when the energy crisis started and 14 at the time that my novel takes place, but I also thought that she would be able to offer some perspectives that my father may not have been able to, since Portage was and is a lower-income area than Valparaiso and her father worked in a different industry. She did not disappoint,

supplementing much of the information that my father provided while also offering up the details of a childhood experience rather different from my father's.

Jacobs, Meg. *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s*.

Hill and Wang, New York, 2016.

This book is a study of the energy crisis of the 1970s, including both the OPEC oil embargo in 1973 and the fallout from the Iranian Revolution; the effects of the energy crisis on American politics; and the ways in which these events shaped the United States government and public perceptions of its effectiveness. I didn't need the information that pertained to the Iranian Revolution, but this book was be a perfect source for me to use in my study of the effects of the energy crisis, even though it does not have a particular focus on the Midwest.

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Scribner, 2010.

This book, originally published in 2010, is Stephen King's second nonfiction work. One-third memoir and two-thirds writing manual, this book includes a great many reminiscences about King's life, the influences on his writing, and what he calls the writer's "toolbox," all of the different rules, tricks, and tips that you need to write successfully, as well as information about publishing. I had read this source before this project, unlike *The Art of Fiction*, and it had some lasting effects on my writing. Reading it again as part of my research into fiction did a lot to show me how much I have changed and how far I still have to develop. It also helped me to reconsider the way that I thought about stories and characters,

especially when keeping King's metaphor about a story being a fossil that you must unearth in mind, and this helped me to conceptualize how I wished to present the story as I went through the editing process.

"Symptoms of PTSD." *Anxiety and Depression Association of America*, <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2020.

This website is exactly as it looks: an inventory of the major symptoms of the disorder and how it may manifest in different types of people. I used this site as a guide when writing the scene in which Freddy breaks down in the haunted house and will continue to use it for other instances of his PTSD in future chapters. In the future, however, I would like to be able to interview or watch interviews with people who suffer from severe PTSD to see how it has affected them. I want to make sure that the disorder is portrayed as accurately as possible and not made a mockery of by accident.

Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life*. Vintage Books, New York, 1999.

This is the biography of Jane Austen that we used in Professor Dalton's Jane Austen colloquium. It is very informative, working with the scant records of Jane Austen's life to sketch as complete a picture as possible of Austen's daily machinations and the events that fueled and influenced her books. This book was very helpful in helping me to understand the events in Austen's life that informed *Persuasion* and allowed me to translate some of these details into my own story.